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"TILL HE COME"

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BY

WILLIAM ROSS, B.D.

Fountainhall Road United Free Church, Edinburgh

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1927

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FOREWORD

"PREACHING," writes one notable living preacher, "is a redemptive agony". For some preachers the mental and nervous effort in the preparation of a sermon is less than for others, but for the great majority the strain of preparing two discourses every week, not to speak of prayer meetings and Bible classes, is very heavy—far heavier than most people realize.

At Communion seasons, which in some denominations are comparatively seldom, and are looked upon as special occasions, the tension is at its greatest. If these twenty-one sermons help any brother minister in the choice of a subject for such occasions, if they help in exposition, illustration, or application, the writer, who offers them to the public with much diffidence, will have found ample reward.

W. R.

EDINBURGH, *March* 1928.

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PART I

BEFORE THE TABLE (PREPARATION)

"TILL HE COME"

CHAPTER I

"SO GREAT FAITH"

"Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof."—MATT. viii. 8.

EASY, obvious, almost inevitable, the utterance of these words, or words of similar import, when one comes to the Table of the Lord, realizing to Whose Table one has come. But how seldom, if ever, these words have carried the same depth of thought and feeling as when they were first uttered by an officer of the proudest army of the proudest Empire of the ancient world, when he stood in the presence of the Carpenter of Nazareth and said, "I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof".

What a miracle of insight and faith and unfeigned humility that centurion was!

In the New Testament two occasions are named on which our Lord "marvelled". The first was in His own land, among His own people, where a full-orbed faith might have been expected, but He found only a total

eclipse. "Jesus marvelled because of their unbelief." The second was when He found a faith so amazing, so unique, in a quarter where one could hardly have looked for it in any degree. Jesus marvelled and said, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel".

The only gateway by which a communicant can enter into the Real Presence, and communicate worthily at the Lord's Table, is a real faith and a real humility.

Motives for communicating may be varied. Motives in this life are always more or less mingled, like that ring of which Browning speaks, in the shaping of which an alloy had to be used, but being once formed, it was dipped in a secret solvent, from which it emerged pure gold.

Conscience has a large place in communicating. To commemorate the Lord's Death is His own command. God's command is man's duty. For many people the ideal of life is the fulfilment of every known duty, an ideal that is surely not unworthy.

Custom, habit, tradition have their place in it; a custom that began with the Institution of the Supper in the Upper Room, a custom that God's people in every age have loyally observed, a custom that comes to us with the weightiest authority, divine and human, and is surely worthy of being maintained.

Some communicants come with a sense of urgent need. They are not the men and women they once were. The pillars of their faith have been shaken; the foundations have been moved. They have slipped and fallen; they come humbled, ashamed, very desperate about themselves, but hoping that the Hand will be stretched out which they may grasp, and by whose strong grasp of theirs their foothold may be regained. Some come with lively expectation. They have been often before. They found Christ, and they found Him the Bread of Life, in the strength of which they went many days. The difference between the experience of communicants at the same table depends almost wholly on the spirit in which they come. Real faith and real hope are never disappointed. " Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

Motives are always mingled and always imperfect; but the one and only attitude of mind in which one may worthily communicate, is a real faith and a real humility. In both of these things the centurion will always stand as the type of the ideal communicant.

Have we then that faith? To define it is needless. We know what it is. " Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby

we receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation, as He is offered to us in the Gospel."

Definition is one thing, however, possession is another. In the 24th Canto of the *Paradiso*, in answer to a question from his guide, Dante gives a very perfect definition of faith. "Right well," said his guide, "hast thou gone over the composition and the weight of that coin, but tell me hast thou it in thy purse?"

In the purse of our soul possessions—we put the question to ourselves—do we have this coin of faith? Have we faith like the centurion? Have we faith in some real degree? Our answer is that we have. We believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour and Lord. To know Christ, for us at least, is to believe in Him. But the strongest faith knows best its own instability, and feels most its need of confirming and strengthening. The prayer of every worthy communicant is this, "Lord, increase our faith".

The Grace of Humility. Do we have that? "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." The Lord is high and holy, inhabiting the praises of eternity, but He dwelleth also with him that is humble and contrite in heart. Contrition and

humility are not the same thing, but they are always found together. Contrition is true penitence. Humility is the attitude of the truly contrite.

But once again, definition is one thing, possession is another; and we put the question to ourselves again: In the purse of our soul possessions is the coin of a sterling humility to be found?

To help us toward that grace, it may be well to consider how it is engendered, and how it grows.

Real penitence is always the result of real vision. Much of our knowledge comes to us by the law of contrast. Heat is known by its opposite, cold. Light is known by its opposite, darkness. The brighter the room from which one emerges, the darker by contrast is the moonless, starless night.

Sin is known, is realized by its opposite, holiness. You see real goodness; you see transparent purity; you see God, the Beauty of Holiness; in that same vision you see also yourself and your sin. Scripture furnishes us with well-known illustrations.

"In the year that King Uzziah died," wrote Isaiah, "I saw the Lord . . . high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple . . . Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of

unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

"I know thou canst do everything," cried Job, "and that no thought can be withholden from thee." God is unveiled to him at last in His omnipotence and omniscience. "I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me, I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee, wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes."

"Depart from me," cried Peter, for at that moment the true divinity of Jesus had been revealed in the miraculous draught of fishes, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

On the night that Peter denied his Lord with cursing and swearing, what was it in the look of Jesus that broke his heart, and sent him out into the night, and shook his frame with sobs? It was not anger; it was not the compassion, the sorrow, the love that were indeed there; but in that face Peter saw perfect goodness—a goodness which in its hour of need he had so shamefully failed; and in that same vision he saw himself and his sin.

The best literature of every age is full of similar illustrations. In his "Autobiography" Mark Rutherford tells how one day on the street he caught a glimpse of a woman's

face which he had never seen before, which he never saw again, but, he says, that face "redeemed" him. So arresting was the beauty of its innocence, so radiant its purity, that it smote him with the glory of goodness, and convicted and saved him.

Our own experience is not without illustration. Is there no gentle, godly face, the face of a mother it may be, that looks down upon us now with its revelation and its rebuke? In my student days in Aberdeen I remember well one such face, an Aberdeen advocate, Gray Campbell Fraser, who spoke often and prayed often in public, and young men flocked to hear him; and when he prayed, they not only listened but they looked; for he was transfigured, and it seemed as if the glory of God smote him full in the face.

The last time I noted it specially was in the Chapel of the Perpetual Adoration in Quebec, where prayer never ceases day or night; the women kneel in relays two by two. What wonderful faces it makes! Heroines too, these women are, for they are vowed to go wherever the Church sends them, to leper hospitals, to pioneer missionary work, to the most difficult, most dangerous task the Church may assign.

To see goodness is to see God; and it is just there in the vision of God, that is of

goodness, that one sees one's self and one's sin.

What, then, is sin? "Sin is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God." "Any want of conformity"—the sin of omission; "any transgression of"—the sin of commission. Sins of commission are indeed legion, but they can be named and numbered, but who can tell his sins of omission? By what calculus can they be numbered, the words of help and hope that might have been uttered, but were not; the deeds of kindness that might have been done, but were not. The "might-have-beens" of life! Is it not when the years multiply and the hair whitens, that one realizes what one might have been and done.

"Then she took up her burden of life again,
Saying only, 'It might have been.'
. . . . . .
God pity them both! and pity us all,
Who vainly the dreams of youth recall.
For of all sad words of tongue or pen,
The saddest are these: 'It might have been!'"

But, thank God, it may yet be.

"The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made:
Our times are in His hand
Who saith, 'A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half'; trust God: see
All, nor be afraid."

What a ring of glad certainty there is in Browning! a certainty that he found in his

faith, for Browning believed in Emmanuel, God with us. It is just here, I think, more than anywhere else, that Browning differs from Carlyle. Both believed in God; both were prophets of righteousness, but Carlyle spoke and thought of God only as far away, transcendent, the Lord God of the Universe, whose command must be obeyed. Browning thought of God as near us, with us, in us, and for a faith like that, failure is not possible, for man's failure would also be God's.

What a strange paradox the Christian life is, with its light and its shade, its hopes and fears, its triumphs and its defeats! The key to it all is this, that our life is not a circle but an ellipse. It has two foci; one is self, and the other is God. The problem of life is to reduce these two centres to one, and that one, God. To do that, we come to Jesus Christ, and we come with a real humility: "We are not worthy". But we come with a real faith: "Speak but the word, and thy servant shall be whole".

CHAPTER II

THE ULTIMATE TEST OF REALITY

"Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."—MATT. vii. 22, 23.

SPEAKING one day of these words by which she had been often troubled and even terrified, a gracious soul said, "Is it possible, as these words seem to imply, that one should believe in Jesus Christ, believe so as to confess Him as Lord, that one should be a worker in His Church, nay, more, that one should be successful in His service, and yet in the Great Day meet only with a definite denial and rejection—'I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity'?"

That any humble, believing, devout soul should be troubled by these words is the last thing our Lord intended. One of the curious anomalies of soul-life is that the humblest and most faithful followers of our Lord are the most spiritually sensitive, so morbidly sensitive that they persist in tormenting their souls with words that have no bearing upon them.

The outstanding example is John Bunyan. To read *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* is to follow the course of a human soul, now in the trough, and now on the crest of the wave; cast down at one moment to the deeper depths of gloom and terror by some word of Scripture wrested from its original context, and perverted in its application, and next moment elated by the comfort of some other text torn out of its original meaning and application.

The converse of that anomaly is not less true, for it is just those men and women whose condition is such that they ought to be alarmed and anxious, who can listen to the most searching Gospel message, and listen as if it had no bearing on their life. Readers of the *Pilgrim's Progress* will remember that the person who had no fear of death or judgment was Ignorance. Death was no difficulty to him. He got a boat and was ferried over the river without wetting his feet. The man who had real soul trouble in dying was Christian, about whom the waters grew deeper and colder, till he would have been overwhelmed, had he not been upborne by the strong arms of Hopeful.

More solemn, searching words than those of our text are not found in Scripture. The occasion is the Last Judgment. Of the certainty of that Judgment there can be no

question. Reason and conscience demand it. Christ and His apostles proclaim it. The manner of the Last Judgment must be uncertain. Prophetic anticipations of it can be only figurative, pictorial, but of the event itself there can be no question. "Some sins go beforehand into judgment; but with some it cometh after." The occasion, then, is Judgment. The case before us, moreover, is not unique; it is not even exceptional. "*Many* will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

Now, first of all, it must be noted that the statement made by these men is not refuted; the truth of it is not questioned. That in the presence of the White Throne any man should clothe himself in the garment of pretence, that he should offer a plea which he knows to be untrue, is not imaginable. That such hypocrisy, if attempted, should not be exposed and rebuked, is equally unthinkable. The inference is that their plea is literally true. Very carefully then, we note the contents of that plea.

(*a*) They were confessed believers in Christ. Jesus was confessed as Lord. On the face of

it, the condition of salvation has been fulfilled. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

(*b*) They were workers in the Christian Church. They preached, prophesied in the name of Christ. The more closely one examines this passage, the more clearly it is evident that the application of it is to Christian workers. The search-light of this meditation falls on the ministry, on office-bearers, on Christian workers as much if not more than on the members of the congregation.

(*c*) Their message was delivered and their service was rendered in the name of Jesus Christ. "Have we not prophesied in thy name?"

(*d*) Most arresting of all: their work was crowned with success. "In thy name have we cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works."

And yet teaching, preaching, profession, and practice were so unreal that Jesus, the Judge, had no alternative. "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

Some time ago I read of an evangelist from the other side of the Atlantic, who addressed great gatherings in London. They were thrilled by her preaching. Professions of

faith were made in America and in this country by the thousand. To create suspicion of the sincerity of evangelists is sheer wickedness. Far be it from us! And yet, soon after, I read of that evangelist that she was arrested and punished for crime.

How far may these things go? Is there any limit to the anomalies of human life? In his volume on *The Teaching of the Twelve* —a volume which competent judges pronounce to be the best ever written on that subject—the late Dr. Bruce devotes a chapter to Judas Iscariot. He points out that Judas, as one of the Twelve, must have taken part in the Mission of the Twelve, and in all probability that of the Seventy. Those missions were crowned with success. Elated with that success, the disciples reported that the very devils had been subject to them. Now the argument from silence is not final, but if for any reason Judas had refused to take his place in that mission, is it not certain that that would have been recorded? If for any reason he alone had failed in the work in which the other missioners were successful, is it not certain that one or other of the evangelists would have put it on record?

From all which the writer concludes that the tree is not always known by its fruits; that usefulness in the work of the kingdom does not always imply goodness; that in the

overruling Providence of God, by which the wrath of man is made to praise Him, men and women who are themselves graceless, may be the means of grace to others.

Am I not right in saying that of all the truths uttered by Jesus Christ, none is more solemn, more searching than this? But let us be on our guard. The lamp of truth that we hold in our hand must be turned inward on our own life, not outward on the life of others. Who are we that we should judge another? To his own Master he shall stand or fall. The light of this truth shines in vain for us unless it searches our own life; and the truth is this—Usefulness does not always imply goodness. You or I may do good service, great service for the Church as ministers, office-bearers, teachers, but that does not prove that we are good men and women. The final test of life is not outward, it is inward; it is not usefulness, it is character—a truth that Jesus put in unforgettable words when He said, "Rejoice not that the spirits are subject to you; but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven".

What, then, is the application? What kind of lives did Jesus have in view when these words were spoken? That question is answered in the passage that follows. With His own rapid, incomparable artistry of words, Jesus sketches two pictures—two

houses, identical in shape, in material, in masonry, but differing radically. The difference is unseen; it lies in the foundation. One of them is founded on sand, the kind of thing that no sane builder would do; but what irrational things are done in the building of life! So long as the air is calm and the sky blue, nothing happens, but sooner or later the test comes; the rain descends, the floods come, the winds blow and beat on that house, and it falls; and great is the fall of it.

The other house meets the same test, but it stands; it is built on rock.

Outwardly, visibly, two lives are the same, the same in profession, in worship, in service, the same in outward success; but the test comes, and one of them falls, and the sound of that fall echoes through the congregation, through the community, through the whole country, it may be; and the Church of Christ is humiliated in the dust.

"About or before this time," writes Thomas Boston, "was the melancholy event of Mr. J. B——'s falling into adultery. He was borne in Dunse, and so an acquaintance of my father's, and he was minister of the meeting-house at Mersington, and not young. This dreadful stumbling-block, laid especially at such a critical juncture as the Revolution, filled the mouths of the ungodly with reproach against the way of religion, and

saddened the hearts of the godly to a pitch. I well know that many a heavy heart it made to me, and I remember the place where I was wont to lament it before the Lord in secret prayer."

The one life rests on some emotional surface experience under which confession is made; the other rests on a definite, final committal, body, soul and spirit, to Jesus Christ. One life is veneer; the other is solid oak. One life is electro-plate; the other is solid silver. One life is gilt; the other is gold.

O God, for reality in the Christian life!

Some years ago the road from Kilmarnock to Glasgow was one of the worst in the country. Tons of metal by the thousand were poured upon it; but in a few weeks it was rutted, holed, uneven, to the discomfort and danger of every traveller on wheels.

"What is wrong with this road?" I asked a roadman one day.

His answer was, "The foundation. Long ago," he proceeded, "this road was founded for weights of three to five tons at most; nowadays, loads of twenty, thirty tons pass over it often every day, at high speed. The foundation cannot bear it."

Weightier than any other object we can name is your life and mine. What foundation is strong enough to bear it? "Other

foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, even Jesus Christ." Found your life on Him; build your life on Him. Choose carefully your materials: the gold of character, the silver of service, the precious stones of the graces of the Holy Spirit, and in that day this welcome will be yours:

"Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

CHAPTER III

SEASONS OF REFRESHING

"Repent ye therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that so there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord."—Acts iii. 19 (R.V.).

The speaker was Peter, the Apostle. The platform from which he spoke could hardly have been stronger—the platform of a great miracle. He spoke to people who had witnessed the most thrilling and the most significant event in the story of the early Church—the healing of a lame man at the Beautiful Gate. The spectators were amazed and deeply moved by it. When people are moved (the emotion may be anything—anger, laughter, tears), deep religious impression may be made. Peter gladly entered the open door of opportunity with a proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

What, then, did he mean by "seasons of refreshing"? Dr. James Moffatt thinks that he meant "a breathing space" (so he renders it), an interval of peace before the coming again of Jesus Christ, the event to which the early Church looked forward with such eager expectation. To differ from Dr. Moffatt

takes some courage. We do not say that he is wrong; a "breathing space" may be part of the content of the word, but it is only a part of it.

The main idea is that of "refreshment". It is the same word that was used by Homer when he tells us how Ulysses and his men were "refreshed" by inhaling the breezes of the ocean. Physically, it is the relief and reinvigoration that one feels in issuing from an overcrowded, air-exhausted room into the open air, the exhilaration which one experiences when, after a crowded session of work, one passes to the bracing air of the moor or mountain or seashore. Spiritually, it is that soul-exhilaration when, after a great act of cleansing, a "spring cleaning" of the inner life, every cobweb and impurity has been washed away by the blood of Jesus Christ, and life flows with a new virility and power.

In the sphere of the body that refreshment is a source of pleasure; in the sphere of the soul we call it by the deeper name—joy. Now joy is an emotion, and emotion may be produced emotionally. A crowded gathering, tense earnestness in preaching, in prayer and in praise, and the soul may be thrilled with spiritual exhilaration. To find fault with that exhilaration would be folly. Surely the soul-life has a right to its pure thrills as much as, nay more than the body.

But this must be remembered. As one of the laws of our being it cannot be too strongly emphasized. An emotion that is produced emotionally will pass like the dew of the morning. The only conditions on which real and abiding soul-exhilaration can be produced are ethical. These conditions are named in our text, "Repent and turn again, repent and return, that your sins may be blotted out, that so there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord."

1. Repent. What is the meaning of Repentance? Why is it that the preachers of both Testaments so often and so insistently called upon the people to repent? Far down in the gorge of the Jordan a great, gaunt, ascetic figure clad in camel's hair and eating locusts and wild honey, preached to vast crowds attracted by the magnetism of a great moral personality. His preaching was a thunder-peal, and the note of it was "repent!"

On the hills of Judæa, and down by the shore of Galilee, another voice, gentler, but not less intense, proclaimed the coming of the kingdom of God, and that proclamation opened with the word "repent." What is repentance? Is it simply penitence? Is it only a feeling, the feeling of regret or remorse or shame with which we look back on some fall or failure of the past? That certainly is part of it, but repentance is far more.

The best exposition of its meaning I know, comes from the life of one of our great writers. At the age of fifteen, Thomas de Quincey was the guest of a certain Lord and Lady Carbery, in Derbyshire. Lady Carbery was a young woman of great beauty of person, but still greater beauty of spirit. She was deeply interested in spiritual things, so much so that she learned Greek that she might read the New Testament in the original, and, more remarkable still, learned Hebrew that she might read the Old Testament. De Quincey was only fifteen, but his mind was clear as crystal, his reading was encyclopædic, his powers of exposition were remarkable. He was a kind of *vade-mecum* for Lady Carbery, and she brought her difficulties to him. Why is it, she asked, that New Testament teachers insist so often and so earnestly on "Repentance"? What does it mean? De Quincey led her at once to the New Testament word, which is *metanoia*, *meta* meaning change, and *noia* or *nous* the mind—a change of mind. Now the *nous* or the mind meant the whole of our inward being, thought and feeling, conscience and will. Repentance, said the young tutor, is not simply a change of feeling, it is a change of one's whole personality. The illustration which he gave, moreover, was singularly good. Before the time of Copernicus, the theory of our planetary

system was the Ptolemaic: the earth was stable and stationary; it was the centre of everything; sun, moon and stars rose and set about the earth. The planetary system was geocentric. But Copernicus lived, laboured and made his momentous discovery: the earth was not flat, it was a globe; it was not stationary, it moved about its axis and about the sun. By that discovery the theory of our planetary system was reversed, revolutionized. Is was not geocentric, earth-centred; it was heliocentric, sun-centred.

By nature, by heredity life is self-centred, earth-centred. The content of life is looked upon as revolving about self. That content is valued just as it ministers to self, its possessions and its pleasures, mayhap its passions. Life is measured by what it gets, not by what it gives. That doctrine of life is wrong and ruinous; fatal as well as foolish —a life in which there may be a few passing pleasures, but nothing that meets the deep necessities of the soul.

One day in God's mercy one's eyes are opened. The folly of one's outlook is revealed. In Jesus Christ the truth is seen and known, and that truth is this—the centre of life is God. That experience is a revolution, and it is a revelation. It is just as if a nation in holy indignation rose and swept a corrupt ruler and a corrupt régime

from the throne, and put a new king upon it. It is a revelation of the evil one is to be saved from, of the good one is to attain. It is life and peace and joy and hope.

Many years ago, a thinker and writer with whom it was my privilege to come into contact, showed me his common-place book in which he had put down things he thought worth remembering. Among other golden thoughts I found this: "What do I mean by Regeneration? By regeneration I mean that the pivot on which my life rests and about which it revolves is lifted out of self and planted in God." "Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavour after, new obedience."

Apart from Scripture and the Shorter Catechism, I know of no better definition than this, for Regeneration and Repentance are different aspects of the same great reality. It is the lifting of the pivot of life out of self and planting it in God.

2. Repent and be converted. What I am about to say now will startle you. The words "be converted" occur seven times in the New Testament; they should not be there at all! The verb in our Authorized Version is in the passive tense, "be con-

verted", as if conversion were something wrought for us and in us. In the Greek in every instance the verb is active. It is something that we ourselves do. In the Revised Version the rendering is accurate. Repent and turn again. *Every time these words "be converted" are found in the New Testament, the verb is active, not passive.* "Repent and return."

That distinction is vitally important. The passive tense is symbolic of a trend of thought and feeling in our country, a fear lest man should imagine that in the great work of redemption he could do anything for himself and so detract from the glory of God. The motive of that fear was right, but like many other right things it has been carried too far. Men have been tempted to think they could do nothing for themselves but wait only for the working of God. Of that fear our Lord knew nothing when He said, "Strive," literally "agonize", "to enter in at the strait gate". James knew nothing of it when he said, "Draw nigh to God"—he places the initiative with man—"and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double-minded." Do it yourselves. Paul knew nothing of it when he said, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God"—how could the Almighty be

jealous of man working out his own salvation when it is He "which worketh in you both to will and to do."

Waiting on God is always right, but it is wrong when waiting is a pretext for doing nothing. "Wherefore criest thou unto me?" said Jehovah to Moses; "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward."

Repent and return. The issues of life depend on the direction of the eyes. Right-about turn! Your eyes, my eyes, have been set on self, on earth, it may be on sin. Turn again, back to home, to holiness, to God.

3. "And your sins shall be blotted out." Is that possible? God says so, and we take Him at His word; but sin has its consequences visible and invisible in body and spirit. Can these be obliterated?

In this life the consequence of sin may indeed remain. Life may be crippled all its days by some act of folly and sin, but the sin itself is blotted out, and the character of its consequence is completely changed. It is no longer penal, it is redemptive; it is not a judgment, it is the chastisement of a father's hand by which life is reminded and admonished, and in the discipline of which it "walks softly all its days". The grief of that consequence passes into grace; its suffering becomes our salvation.

Such, then, are the conditions of Soul-

refreshing. Fulfil these conditions, and the fruit of them will be a great Refreshment. You will find it now, and you will find it still more abundantly at the Table of our Lord.

One thing more. If you ask me what that refreshment will be, I would answer in the words of one of the great documents of our faith: the benefits that accompany or flow from Repentance—returning and the blotting out of sin—are assurance of God's love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase of grace and perseverance therein to the end.

CHAPTER IV

THE *SINE QUA NON* OF WORTHY COMMUNICATING

"Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?"—JOHN xxi. 17.

FOR a man or woman in the closest, tenderest relationship of life, betrothed or married, to put that question one to the other, for a father or mother to put that question to a beloved child, would not be surprising, but for one grown man to put it to another implies an occasion on which the emotions of both have been stirred to their depths. Such an occasion connotes a history, and the content of its thought and feeling can be understood only when that history is recalled.

The roots of that occasion go back to the Upper Room, when in clear, tense, unmistakable words our Lord told His disciples again what they had so often failed to believe, that He must go away.

Following the Gospel of John, Peter said, "Lord, whither goest thou?" Jesus answered and said, "Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now, but thou shalt follow me afterwards". The pronouns are singular. Peter felt as if his personal loyalty had been

challenged. "Lord, why cannot I follow thee now?" for the rest I cannot speak, but "I will lay down my life for thy sake." Jesus answered and said, "Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, the cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice".

Peter meant all that he said. There was no moment in his life when he was more completely sincere. But, alas for our self-ignorance, for the feebleness of our best resolves, "words written on water," "tow before the fire of sudden temptation". The morning had not dawned before he had denied his Lord three times, and the third time with cursing and swearing. At that moment the cock crew; conscience awoke. Had the Master heard? Peter turned his eyes to the spot in the courtyard where the trial had already begun, and Jesus' eyes met his with a look of such pain and pity and wounded love that Peter never forgot it till his dying day. Stabbed with a great remorse, he passed out into the night, and his big frame was shaken with sobs. "He wept bitterly."

The incident from which out text is chosen was the third time that our Lord had appeared to His disciples, and it was not the first time that Peter had received a message from Him. With that incomparable kindness which was part of our Lord's being,

Peter had been singled out and named in one of His messages. "Tell the disciples *and Peter*," said Jesus to the women at the grave, "that I go before them into Galilee." Knowing the bitterness of the cup he was now drinking, knowing that he repented in dust and ashes and waited for the word of forgiveness he felt could hardly be spoken, Jesus said pointedly, "Tell the disciples and Peter". Peter heard the message, and his heart leapt at the words. Had he heard aright? He could hardly believe it. "Did Jesus say that? Are you quite sure that he named me?" There was no question of it. They all heard it, and these were His words. For the first time since the Upper Room the night of his misery was lit up by a star of wonder and of hope.

The first disciple to recognize Jesus in the morning twilight was John. Great love has quick vision. How nimbly in a crowded audience a loved form and face are recognized, how the scene is transformed by his or her presence! John looked and wondered, put his hand to his eyes and gazed intently, and in one moment the world and his own life were transformed, for Christ was there; he was sure of it, and he cried, "It is the Lord".

The first disciple to race toward Him was Peter. The boat was too slow for him.

Wrapping his cloak about him, he leapt into the sea and made for the shore. Burning with shame, but broken with a great love, he said in his heart, "Oh, that He could know how I hate myself for what I did, and how I adore Him!"

For Jesus Christ a longing like that is irresistible. Peter was already fully forgiven; but forgiveness is the greatest gift man can receive. It cannot be lightly given; it must not be lightly received. The soil and the setting must be prepared.

So when they had broken their fast, in the quiet, cool hour of the morning, Jesus turned to Peter and said, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?"

What did Jesus mean by "more than these"? The weight of the opinion of Marcus Dods is very great, and it was his opinion, and that of many others, that the reference is to the boats and nets and the vocation of which these were the symbol. "Are you wedded to these things? Do they mean more to you than I, and the life and work for which I stand, and to which you came so promptly at my call? Will you not return to the task for which you were chosen and ordained three years ago?"

That, indeed, may be the true interpretation, but weighty minds think differently, and my mind holds with theirs. It was surely

wise and salutary that Peter should be reminded of the boast so rashly made, that his love and loyalty were stronger, more dependable than those of any other disciple. "Though all should forsake thee, yet will not I." "You remember these words, Simon; do you still hold to them? Do you still say that you love me more than these?" Peter's silence on that part of the question was significant. He remembered it only too well. As long as he lived, that boast would not be made again. The first part of the question could be answered, and he answered it with his whole heart, "Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee."

"Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" The question is repeated, but the comparison is left out. "Are you quite sure of yourself now?" Not indeed that the Reader of hearts doubted the reality of his confession, but He knew also how Peter would welcome the chance of declaring it again. The answer was the same, only more eager, more intense. "Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee."

But why was the question put a third time? Was it not enough that it should be answered twice? A great Surgeon was at work. Does it not seem as if He gave one superfluous probe? Peter was grieved when the question was put the third time. He felt it like a wound. The reason of the

threefold repetition was probably twofold. Peter had denied Jesus three times. Three times the opportunity was given him of retracting, reversing that denial, cancelling it for ever. That denial had been made in a storm of emotion, of fear and anger. The passion with which the retraction is made must not be less—a flame of love and pure devotion. Moved as he had never been before, laying hold of the only instrument of verification that lay to his hand—an appeal to omniscience—he cried out, "Yea, Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee." Jesus answered and said, "Feed my sheep".

Now it is worth noting that the first injunction was "Feed my lambs"; worth noting also that for the second injunction there is a variant reading, namely, "Feed my little sheep". To my mind that is the true reading, and, if that be so, the commissions of Jesus are graded, rising to a climax.

The cloud that hung over Peter was the doubt whether, with a record like his, it would be possible for him to do any work for Jesus again. That cloud must be gently, gradually lifted. "Simon, you denied me, but you have repented, and you are forgiven. There is still work that you can do. There are the children. Grown-up people may know of your defection and remember it, but children

do not know, and if they did they would not count it against you—'Feed my lambs'. Simon, you are forgiven; 'feed my little sheep'. There are men and women like yourself, weak and fallible, but penitent; and, knowing their own weakness, they will be charitable to yours. Tell them your story, your temptation, your sin, your repentance, your restoration. They will find in it counsel, comfort, inspiration, 'Feed my little sheep'. Simon, son of Jonas, you love me. You call on omniscience to attest it. It is attested. I know it is true. No work for the kingdom is too great for you, work for young or old, sinner or saint—no limit, no exception. Your commission is given: take it. 'Feed my sheep'."

How large and generous and unqualified is the trust that Jesus Christ reposes in fallen but forgiven lives! How different from the spirit of the world and even that of the Church. One life has been sorely tested and has fallen, but repentance has been deep and real; may such an one take part in the work of the Church, may he teach in the Sunday School? We take our answer from Christ—"Feed my lambs".

May such a fallen but forgiven life take part in the work of a mission? We take our answer from Christ again—"Feed my little sheep". One of the best kirk-sessions I have

known was composed very largely of reclaimed lives—men who had been intemperate, impure, dishonest, openly and scandalously so, but, under the winning power of a Home Mission minister, repented and returned, and with clean hands and glad hearts carried the vessels of the Lord.

One of the most effective evangelists I have known was a reformed drunkard in Dundee. He was known as "Happy Ned". His addresses had little variety. They might be summed up in these words:

"Once I was blind,
Now I can see,
And I never could tell how it came to be,
But this I know well,
Christ lived and loved and died for me."

But the joy of the Lord was his strength, and he was a noted soul-winner. Other things being equal, is any place or privilege or work in the Church too high for one who has greatly sinned but has been greatly forgiven? What of Peter, and Paul, the spectator and abetter in the death of Stephen; and Augustine, whose youthful feet trod deep in the mire of sin; and Bunyan, the blasphemer? Is there any pulpit, any moderatorship, any archiepiscopal chair that would not be honoured by such occupants as these? God's forgiveness is full and free and final. God's restoration is complete.

God's trust in reclaimed lives has no limit. Can man do better or more wisely than God?

Now the lesson of this golden passage is clear as noonday. Where love is, and love is real, no work for Christ can be too hard or too high. The one motive and the one essential power of all effective work is Love. But Love is not less the source of all real worship. Take an extreme case. The mind may be uneducated, illiterate; the ear for music may be uncultured or entirely lacking, but where love is, worship is real. The loftiest moment in public worship on this side of time is the Table of the Lord. The difference between the Lord's Table and an ordinary act of worship is one of degree, not of kind. Its appeal is stronger, touching as it does every sense of the body, every sensibility of the spirit. Preaching, Prayer, Praise appeal to the ear.

The symbols of our Lord's death appeal to the eye, to the ear, to the sense of touch and of taste. The senses are soul-gates, and the Lord's Supper besieges and enters by each of them. As our Scottish reformer put it, in substance if not in these very words, "What I take in an ordinary service between my finger and thumb, at the Lord's Table I take with my haill hand".

No one should come to the Table lightly, but to communicate is Christ's command,

and the reason for abstaining must be unanswerable. The preacher draws a bow at a venture. Through a deep sense of sin and unworthiness some of you have absented yourselves from the Table. Thank God for the sense of sin, for a keen conscience about it, but let not that keep you away.

It is told of "Rabbi" Duncan, the great preacher, that on one occasion at a communion he noticed a woman in the front pew trembling, weeping silently. When the cup was offered her, she hesitated once and again. Leaning over in his kindly, fatherly way, and using the native Doric, he whispered, "Tak' it, woman, tak' it; it's for sinners".

> "There's a wideness in God's mercy,
> Like the wideness of the sea;
> There's a kindness in His justice,
> Which is more than liberty."

The love of Christ is truly wonderful. It is omnipotent—it conquers everything. The past is forgiven and forgotten, as if it had never been. The one, only question that our Lord puts to every intending communicant is this—"Lovest thou me?"

CHAPTER V

THE TESTING OF THE SOUL

"Let a man examine himself."—1 Cor. xi. 28.

The Palace Beautiful in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* is the Communion Table—the first time that the Pilgrim sat at the Table of the Lord. The porter of that Palace is Watchful, whose duty it was to open the gate to the candidate and let him in, or to close it and keep him out. The Roll which slipped from Pilgrim's hand in the arbour was the witness of his own heart, the inward evidence of his spirit which he lost through self-indulgent sleep. The four damsels—Discretion, Piety, Prudence and Charity—are the personification of the examination through which every honest communicant puts himself, or is put by a watchful minister, before taking his place at the Table.

Here and now, with this topic before us, I would suggest that we form ourselves into a communicants' class. Some of us have sat at the Table many times, and mean to do so again if God will, for it is good to be there. Some have not yet done so, but the desire is there, growingly there, that they

might take their place with the goodly number that sit at the Table.

"The sun is set," said Watchful; "how is it that you come so late? Why is it that you did not arrive sooner?" If, this evening, the way is opened up by which even one communicant comes sooner to the Table, if one of us comes more humbly, more sincerely, more preparedly to the Table, this service will not have been in vain.

1. Discretion. The first damsel that questioned Christian was Discretion. Her examination was preliminary and general—his name, the place from which he had come, how he got into the way, what he had seen and heard in the way, and his motive for seeking admission to the Palace. The Pilgrim answers clearly and quickly. His name is Christian. He has no hesitation about that. He does not "hope" that he is in the way. He knows that he is in it, definitely, finally committed to it. He entered by the Wicket Gate; he came by way of the Cross, where he had a marvellous experience of liberation and peace, his heavy burden loosening and rolling from his shoulders. His reason for coming to the gate of the Palace was that he had heard that the Palace was built for the succour and security of pilgrims.

Discretion's answer was a smile, but there was "water in her eyes". Her joy was so

deep and full and tender that it nearly overflowed in tears.

Now it must be remembered that these damsels were "daughters of the King", so perfectly *en rapport* with the Lord of the Palace that their feelings were one with His. Their joy was the joy of the Lord; and of those joys which our Risen and Ascended Lord can feel, none is keener than this, that one should turn from the error of one's ways, and enter the path of life, and in due time sit at the Table of the Lord.

Overjoyed at finding a new pilgrim and a real one, Discretion calls her three sisters Piety, Prudence and Charity. These are Pilgrim's examiners. The subject of examination is Experience. The only book they open is the book of his life. That subject, moreover, is divided into three parts. The first is the experience of the past—the motives that led him to enter on the way of life, and what he saw and heard there; and that section belonged to Piety. The second is the experience of the present, and especially the presence of sin—the imperfect sanctification of his life, and the means by which sanctification was helped and furthered. That section belonged to Prudence. The third was the sphere of conduct—what he had done for others, and especially for members of his own

home. That section was taken charge of by Charity.

2. Piety. Now in reading over the examination of Piety—question and answer—that part particularly in which Pilgrim's motives are described, one is struck with the large place occupied by the emotions of Fear and Hope, especially Fear, in inducing him to enter the narrow way. The reason why he left his home was a dreadful din in his ears, the certainty namely that the city in which he lived was doomed to destruction. The fear of death made him flee. In Interpreter's House nothing made a deeper impression upon him than a dreadful dream which left the victim of it trembling, shuddering with fear. In this dream the Day of Judgment had come. The Throne was set, and the Judge was seated upon it. From His person there issued flames, so that no one could approach. The bottomless pit opened beside the dreamer and threatened to engulf him. The order was given, "Gather my wheat into my garner". Many were gathered in, but he was left behind. He tried to hide himself, but he could not, and he still shuddered to think of it.

Second only to Fear was the impression made by the stately Palace in beautiful grounds, with its inmates on the roof clad in

garments of gold—the Hope and prospect of glory—the crowd that gazed upon it eager to enter, but afraid to venture because of enemies about the gate ready to fall on them; the man with the book and the ink-horn and the pen ready to take down the names of those who would venture, and the bold man who at last went forward and said, "Set down my name, sir", and drew his sword, and hacked his way forward, and after giving and receiving many wounds passed through the gate.

A great Hope and a still greater Fear! Are these the only motives for entering on the way of Life? Not so. Not even in John Bunyan, for, later on, in the examination of Prudence, one of his motives in desiring to enter the Palace is found to be his desire "to see Him *alive* who hung *dead* on the Cross". Gratitude and Love have a place in his motives as well as Hope and Fear. There is a fine idealism in this great Puritan as well as a vivid realism. There is a passion for Holiness to which he gives frequent and forceful utterance. Beyond question, however, the motive of Hope and of Fear did fill a larger place in the teaching of Bunyan's days and even in our early days than they do in the thought and teaching of the present day.

Do they now find an adequate place in our

thoughts? Is the subject of Judgment often or ever heard from the pulpits of the present day?

On these motives of Hope and Fear one of the common but crude criticisms of the Gospel is founded. Salvation is said to be another name for Selfishness, a method by which men and women escape the punishment they deserve, and receive a reward they have not merited. To reply to that criticism is not worth while. What man or woman would not gladly escape from misery if it were possible? Which of us would not humbly, gratefully accept deliverance from death if it came to us through the sacrificial love and suffering of a friend, a sacrifice long since accomplished?

One thing, however, is certain, that the fear of the Lord and the fear of Judgment do not have the place in our minds which they once had, and which they still ought to have. Judgment is certain—certain, not only from Revelation, but from Reason. If there were no Judgment, no reward and punishment, the government of the Universe—we say it deliberately—would be immoral. That the Final Judgment tarries is no evidence against its certainty:

> "Though the mills of God grind slowly,
> Yet they grind exceeding small;
> Though with patience He stands waiting,
> With exactness grinds He all."

Some sins go beforehand into judgment, but with some it cometh after. It is given to all men once to die, and after death the Judgment.

Surely also it is well to remember that the most tremendous, the most awe-inspiring words ever spoken about Judgment fell from the lips of Him who alone knew perfectly what it is, and who loved us even unto death. That suffering cannot be light for which He found no other figure but fire.

3. Prudence. The third damsel is Prudence, and her subject is present experience. "Do you not think sometimes of the country from which you came?"

"Yes, but with much shame and detestation."

Here is a moral touchstone. In every life there is past sin and shame, deeds of shame they may have been, desires cherished they may have been, playing with fire, skirting precipices over which you would have fallen but for the intervention of God's special Providence. How do you think of these things? Do you dwell upon them, hover about them in memory like a moth about a flame? These are straight questions, and they are all needed, for some souls feed the fires of present desires with the cinders of past sins. Do you think of them like Pilgrim

with shame and detestation? Do you feel like Cowper, when he wrote:

> "I hate the sins that made Thee mourn,
> And drove Thee from my breast".

"Do you not bear away some of the things you were conversant withal?"

"Yes, but greatly against my will, especially my inward and carnal cogitations."

Another touchstone. To deny that such inward and carnal cogitations have any place in our life were futile. If any man say he hath no sin, the truth is not in him. From these fallen carnal natures of ours they rise as inevitably as steam from a hot geyser. But what is your attitude towards them? Are they there *with your consent*? Do you welcome them? Do you open the door to them with your own hands? Or do you feel like Thomas Boston when he wrote, "I cannot be free from sin, but God knows that He would be welcome to make havoc of my lusts to-night, and make me henceforth a holy man. I know no lust that I should not be content to part with. My will, bound hand and foot, I desire to lay at His feet"?

"Do you not find sometimes as if these things were vanquished which at other times are your perplexity?"

"Yes, but that is seldom; but these are golden hours to me." Are there no such

golden hours, days, weeks when you are master of yourself, master of circumstances, master of life? If only the door of life were wide open to God, if only we were wholly possessed of His Spirit, would such golden experiences not be continuous, unbroken?

4. Charity. The fourth damsel is Charity, and charity begins at home. "Have you a family? Are you a married man?"

"I have a wife and four small children."

"Why did you not bring them with you?"

To criticize and condemn Christian as selfish because he set out from his home and left his wife and children is the limit of silly, fanatical fault-finding. This pilgrimage was spiritual. The *locus* of it was his own soul. His body was where it ought to be, in his own home. Christian had never been a better husband, a kinder father, more loyal or more loving. Had he not spoken to them, prayed for them? He had done both with tears, but they would not listen. He was left to go alone.

What was the reason? The trouble lay with the mother. How seldom that is! How great is the debt that the human race owes to good mothers! But this mother was a woman of the world, and she was afraid of losing it. To show an interest in vital religion in the days of Bunyan meant social ostracism. Society would break with her, and

she could not face the thought of it. Later on, thank God, Christian's prayers prevailed, and Christiana and Mercy and the boys became notable persons in the great pilgrimage, but as yet they were not equal to it. "My children were given to the foolish delights of youth."

It may be indeed that the Puritan ideal and rule of life were too narrow, too intolerant of the innocent recreations of youth. The offence of the Cross was heavier then than in these more tolerant days. Christianity is narrow on one thing alone, and that is wrong-doing. But that life has yet to be lived in which, for Christ's sake, many things have not to be put off and many things have not to be put on; and many are called, but few are the choice souls who can do it.

Pilgrim did his best for his home. His conscience was clear. Is our conscience also clear? Have we done our best? Have we ever definitely helped anybody to find Christ? Is there any young person over whom we have charge or influence to whom we have never spoken seriously, tenderly, solemnly of the truth and beauty and liberty and joy of life in Christ; of the folly, tragedy, ruin of sin?

Is our conscience clear? Is it our purpose and prayer so to live that it will be clear? Then truly our communion will be real. It

is real now, and when evening comes, this evening, every evening, we go to rest in a "large upper chamber whose window is opened toward the sun rising, and the name of that chamber is Peace."

PART II

AT THE TABLE (COMMUNION)

CHAPTER VI

LOVE'S BEAUTIFUL DEED

"She has done a beautiful thing to me."—MARK xiv. 6 (Moffatt).

DR. JAMES MOFFATT and his rendering of the New Testament need no commendation from any one. To commend is perhaps also to presume. Without presuming, however, we may say that his rendering of this text is original, attractive and accurate. The Greek word is καλός, and it means "good," but it also means "beautiful." It is the adjective which is used of the good seed sown in good ground; it is the adjective used of our Lord when He said, "I am the good Shepherd". "She hath wrought a good work on me" (A.V.) is accurate, but moral goodness is the same thing as moral beauty. With a fine insight, the Greeks recognized that identity, and their word καλός is the term in which both ideas coalesce. Dr. Moffatt, in my opinion, has put us all in his debt by an original, memorable and accurate rendering of these words, "She has done a beautiful thing to me."

Following immediately upon the cold,

calculating criticism of the disciples, the glowing appreciation of Jesus and the prophecy with which it is accompanied are arresting. "Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her." Coming from any other lips but His it might seem exaggerated and excessive. What was there in this act, praiseworthy and beautiful as we feel it to be, that it should be so linked with the Gospel of the Cross that the two should stand or fall together?

To put the question thus, to my mind, is to open the door to a true interpretation of it. The more carefully it is studied, the more clearly it will appear that the elements of worth and beauty in this offering, in their own measure, are the same elements as we find in the Cross of Jesus Christ.

1. The motives of it are the same. The central motive in both is love. Jesus loved Martha and Mary and their brother Lazarus, and that love was whole-heartedly returned. The reason why Jesus specially loved the household at Bethany is not revealed. Love's reasons may be divined, but they are not easily defined. You love one person more than another, but why? "Just because——" you say, but you find it hard to put the

reason in words, and you fall back on some phrase like " elective, spiritual affinity".

Jesus Christ loves everybody. Jesus lived His own law and ideal even to the loving of His enemies, doing good to them that hated Him, praying for them that despitefully used Him. He loved Judas Iscariot, and would fain have saved him from himself; but God Himself fails to dissuade when the Spirit is resisted till it is quenched.

Love, however, whether divine or human, has its degrees and its preferences, and these differences arise from spiritual affinity. In the New Testament record we read of three people whom Jesus specially loved. One was the rich young ruler, so eager, so earnest in his quest for the highest, running and kneeling and questioning the Great Master; so perfect in his obedience to the law as he knew it, but faced with so hard a test and unequal to it: " Jesus beholding him, loved him". The second was John the Apostle, who leaned on His breast at supper, who gloried in the title, " the disciple whom Jesus loved". The third was the household at Bethany; and in that home we may be sure, by special insight and understanding and pure womanly sympathy, the first place in Jesus' affections was held by Mary. That love was returned with a pure, whole-hearted devotion.

The second element in her motive was an overflowing gratitude. Her cup was full, and flowed over. This feast was held in the house of Simon the Leper, one of those lepers no doubt that had been touched and healed by Jesus Christ—a feast of gratitude to which, with fine feeling, the guests invited were people with a gratitude like his own. One of the guests was Lazarus, and Lazarus was Mary's only brother, and Lazarus had crossed the river of death, but had come back at the call of the Lord of life, sitting there silent as always, for we do not read of a single word he spoke; but what witness more convincing than his, the witness of a risen life? For that incomparable gift, Mary's cup was full; but the Giver of that gift was more and greater infinitely than His gift, and while she sat at His feet and listened to His words, her cup overflowed.

The third element in her emotion was a tender, womanly sympathy. Is it possible, I wonder, that Mary, with a deeper insight begotten of a deeper love than any of the disciples', foresaw and anticipated His approaching death? It would seem as if it were so. Jesus' words can hardly bear any other interpretation: "She hath kept this against the day of my burial". Moffatt renders it more definitely: "She has anticipated the perfuming of my body for burial".

Death on the Cross had been definitely and frequently foretold, but the disciples would not, could not believe it. Peter spoke for the Twelve at Cæsarea Philippi when he protested earnestly, almost angrily, "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee." Mary also knew of that prediction, and the words fell on the soil of a simple, unquestioning faith. She knew in her heart that very soon her Lord was about to die. What, then, could she do for Him? The only thing that a woman could do was to buy perfume and have it ready for His body. That perfume must be precious. It must be real nard. The price of it was three hundred pence; but it must be remembered that a penny was the wage of a working man for a day. Three hundred pence was the income of a working man for a year. In present-day values, the sum represented is more than £100. "She hath done what she could," said her Lord. In all probability it was all that she possessed.

That perfume was kept in reserve for the day of His burial, but that day in Simon's house, while she sat and listened and looked now at her brother and now at her Lord, she could no longer refrain; she rose and slipped out and found the box of spikenard very precious, and returned, and broke it over His head and feet, and wiped His feet with the

hairs of her head, and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. This Church, the Church universal, is full of it to-day. The perfume of that lovely act will cling to the Church's garments as long as the world shall last. Once at least in His life on earth our Lord received the love and gratitude and devotion that were His due, and for that action Mary has placed the whole Church under an endless, unpayable debt.

Love and gratitude and sympathy—are not these in their divine measure the motives of the Cross of Jesus Christ? "He saved others," cried the spectators of the Cross, "himself he cannot save." We know well that He offered Himself of His own free will; we know that at any moment if he had so willed it His enemies could have been rendered powerless; we know that He could have descended from the Cross if He had so desired. There surely lay the supreme agony of Jesus' Passion, to know that He could escape it if He would—a temptation that was conquered only by the knowledge that if He thus failed in the supreme sacrifice, the will of God would not be done, and His life on earth would be in vain. Jesus was bound to the Cross not by the nails—to Him nails were nothing—but by a threefold cord, unseen, but unbreakable: a great love, a great pity,

and a great gratitude. We say advisedly a great gratitude, and we would put it first—His glad consciousness that the will of God was being done, and the world was being saved. But along with that, and not less powerful, was His great love. Put in its simplest form, the motive of the Cross was this: "He loved me, and gave himself for me".

2. The nature of Mary's offering was the same as that of the Cross. It was sacrificial. If we are right in thinking that the offering was her all, the analogy is very close, for what more can any man give than his life; and Jesus gave that. With all reverence we may take the words Jesus used of Mary and say, He did what he could and what no other could have done:

> "There was no other good enough
> To pay the price of sin:
> He only could unlock the gate
> Of heaven, and let us in."

To have spoken to Mary of the cost of her offering would have wounded her. "Cost!" she would have exclaimed; "how can price be named in the same breath with Jesus Christ; by what standard can they be compared? Cost is nothing. Christ is all in all." To be able to give that gift, and to have it accepted as it was, was the deepest joy of her life. We remember this day, and

we must never forget the sufferings of Jesus Christ; but they are past, and past for evermore. They exist now only as a memory. With a great glad certainty we can be sure that the brightest star in the crown of our Lord and His own gladdest memory are that once in the end of the world He took away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

3. The results of both acts in their own measure were the same. The house was filled with the odour of the ointment. The one mighty event by which the atmosphere of human life in every age is sweetened, by which it is regenerated and saved, is the Cross of Jesus Christ. The glory of Mary's act is this, that in each of its essentials, in its own measure, it is the same as the Cross of Jesus Christ. The two stand or fall together. To commemorate one is also to commemorate the other.

But wherefore this waste? Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor? To part from this incident without a comment on the criticism of Judas (according to John, but of all the disciples, according to the Synoptists) would be to leave our task unfinished. Judas' motive was contemptible. He was a thief: he bore the bag, and took what was put therein. The other disciples were ingenuous

in their protest, but they were mistaken. They were severely practical men, and to their minds the only criterion of an action was usefulness. What practical purpose was served by pouring this precious ointment on his feet, while he was yet alive?

If Jesus had been dead, no protest would have been made. The ways of the world have been always the same. Living men and women may long for some token of affection, but they receive none; dead bodies are anointed with perfumes, graves are covered with costly flowers.

Now Jesus never belittled usefulness. His life is the perfect example of unwearying service. He went about doing good. But service is not more precious than pure selfless devotion. Gifts should bear a right proportion to the person to whom they are given, and the gratitude they express. Can anything be too precious for the King of men, the Saviour of our souls?

In the town of Jesmond, near Newcastle, the late Dr. Mitchell, the munificent benefactor of Aberdeen University, built a very perfect church. It is not large, it holds about four hundred worshippers; but in architecture and in adornment, in material and in masonry, it is as perfect as man can make it. The cost of it was very great. People asked him,

"Wherefore this waste; why was not this great sum given to the work of Christ at home or abroad?" His answer was, "When I build a ship, I see to it that the best plank I can find is put in it from stem to stern. I do this for a dwelling-place for man. Shall I do less for God?"

"Lo, I dwell in a house of cedar," said David, "but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains." The honour of building a house for God was not given to David, but he gloried in his preparations for it, and he "did well that it was in his heart".

Every Sunday, loving hands put flowers on the Communion Table of this and other churches. Flowers in winter are scarce and costly. Wherefore this waste, when every fund of the Church is gasping for money? "Trouble them not," says our Lord, "they have done a beautiful thing to me."

What is the most perfectly beautiful thing in the story of our race? Is it not that Ladder of Humiliation whose lowest step we are about to commemorate this morning, when He who was in the form of God thought it not a thing to be grasped at to be equal with God, but "made himself of no reputation, and took on him the form of a servant; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto

death, even to the death of the Cross". At this Table of the Lord, what is the most beautiful thing we can do? Is it not the offering of ourselves in a great love and a great gratitude?

CHAPTER VII

THE MOUNTAIN-TOP

"Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias."—MATT. xvii. 4.

IMPULSIVE Peter, so human, so fallible, so eager to do the right thing, but, in that excess of eagerness, so certain to go one step too far—the best known, the best beloved of all the Apostles! Six days before this, at Cæsarea Philippi, when our Lord in unmistakable language announced that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things of the scribes, and die and rise again the third day, this same disciple boldly button-holed his Master and took Him aside and rebuked Him, and said, "Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee".

Moved with a great wonder when Jesus came to them, walking on the sea, and feeling himself equal to anything in the company of such a Master, this same disciple said, "Lord, bid me come unto thee on the water," and Jesus said, "Come". Peter always over-rated something, and this time he over-

rated his own faith, and would have sunk in the water but for the strong hand stretched forth to save him.

In the Upper Room, at the washing of the disciples' feet, this same disciple drew his feet indignantly beneath him and peremptorily refused to allow Jesus to touch them; but, catching a glimpse of the soul-significance of that washing, leapt to the opposite extreme, and cried, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. If this washing mean partnership with thee, I cannot have too much of it. Body and soul, let me be bathed in the waters of fellowship with thee."

In the Garden of Gethsemane, to give one more illustration, in a storm of anger, this same disciple drew his sword, missed the head of the High Priest's servant, but sheared off his right ear. Impetuous, blundering Peter, so utterly loyal at heart, but so ignorant of his Master and so ignorant of himself; so often crossing the boundary where courage passes into foolhardiness, and wisdom passes into folly!

"Master, it is good for us to be here." So far Peter spoke well and wisely, but for a nature like his the further step was almost inevitable. "Let us stay here always. Let us make here three tabernacles: one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias." In

that mountain experience we find some close analogies to the Table of the Lord.

1. Soul elevation means soul vision. In his perfect little volume, *Imago Christi*, the late and great author opens the book of his own experience at a page of pure gold. One summer forenoon, in vacation, he climbed a moorland hill above Inveraray, and lay resting, meditating in the sunshine. The day was calm and still. The silence of the moor was complete. Far away at the base of the hill lay Inveraray, so distant that no sound of its traffic reached his ear. Beyond the town, the Loch lay shining like a shield of burnished silver. The Lord was in His Holy Temple; the whole earth kept silence before Him, and in that silence it seemed as if God were so near that one had only to put forth a finger and touch the hem of His garment. Soul elevation means soul vision.

Now in most lives there have been mountain-top experiences, like that of Ebenezer Erskine, when he said, "On that night I got my head out of time into eternity". The spirit is lifted up and so liberated from sense and sin, so cleansed and braced by the breezes of God's high place, that the desire springs up in our hearts, "Oh, if this could only continue and never cease, how good and gladsome life would be!"

For some of us, if the truth were told, such

experiences did happen in our earlier life, but they happen no more. Something else has happened: a cloud has come between us and the sun—some habit of thought or desire or action by which the vision of God has been dimmed, if not wholly obliterated. First love, the first joy of Christian experience has been lost, as Cowper had lost them when the most pathetic soul-cry in our language was put into perfect words:

"Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus and His word?

Return! O Holy Dove! return,
Sweet messenger of rest;
I hate the sins that made Thee mourn,
And drove Thee from my breast.

The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from Thy throne,
And worship only Thee."

Now it must be remembered that mountain-top experiences are not meant to be permanent. Life in itself and in its circumstances is so constituted that they cannot be so. Mountain-tops are meant to be visited, not to be resided upon. The disciple is not greater than his Master, and the mountain experience was transient for Him as for us. For Him and His disciples descent to the valley of sin, suffering, service, sacrifice, was

as inevitable as for us; and in that the Mount of Transfiguration is like the Table of the Lord. Mountain experiences are transient; they are brief, but they are precious. They are food, in the strength of which the soul may travel many difficult days.

2. It was good to be there, because of the company. Moses was there, the mighty leader and lawgiver, the man of God, the meekest of men, but one who by natural gifts and force of character surpassed every man of his dispensation as much as the colossal statue by Michael Angelo towers above the stature of ordinary men. Elias was there, the prophet, the heroic reformer, facing single-handed the King and Queen and their idolatrous court, and routing them on the summit of Carmel. Jesus was there, the King in His beauty; for Jesus was transfigured before them, and His raiment shone like the sun.

Greatness is of two kinds. Life may be great in natural gifts—a Burns or a Byron—but lacking in goodness. Life may be great in goodness, but lacking in natural gifts. To be great in both is to be one of the supreme personalities of the race.

Jesus and Moses and Elias—what company on earth was comparable with that?

To be present at the Lord's Table is good, because of its company. So far as visible, the Table is the fellowship of men and women, frail and fallible and deeply conscious of it; but men and women whose lives are committed to Jesus Christ. May we not say of this Table, it is a communion of good men and women, some of them saints? Assuredly we can say that. You and I are Christ's folk. With all our imperfections, we are sure of that, and no man can pluck us out of His hand. The visible Table, however, is the least part of it—a part that is limited by four stone walls. The Table of the Lord invisible is limited only by vision, imagination, faith.

In one of the greatest of the world's pictures — the Sistine Madonna — Raphael puts on canvas his conception of the cloud of witnesses. Seen from a distance, the space around and above the figures seems like a cloud; seen nearer, the cloud resolves itself into faces that may be recognized.

Here and now at this Table the veil of sense is very tenuous; it is almost transparent. Men and women, your brave sons whose bodies were killed in the war, but whose spirits are more fully alive than ever, look down upon you in tender, smiling recognition, and beyond these the multi-

tude no man can number, of all kindreds and peoples and tongues, clothed in white robes; and there, high and lifted up, yet so near that the faintest prayer can be heard, the King, the Saviour of our souls.

3. To be present at the Lord's Table is good because of the conversation. The subject of it is the same as that on the Mount of Transfiguration. They talked with Jesus about the decease He should accomplish at Jerusalem. The only topic of conversation possible at the Lord's Table, the one event we have met to commemorate, is the death of our Lord. But the keynote is different. The note of their conversation was subdued, sorrowful — the sympathy of heaven with the agony He would soon endure. The note of our Table is joy—joy unspeakable and full of glory, the joy of men and women redeemed by what has been accomplished.

On the evening of the first Easter Sunday, when the disciples were gathered together, and the doors were shut for fear of the Jews, Jesus appeared to them, and showed them His hands and His feet. "Then were they glad when they saw the Lord"—glad for their own sake, for in these three years of fellowship their life had become so identified with His that, when He left

them, they were utterly lost—sheep with no shepherd.

For His sake they were gladder still. Dimly, imperfectly, yet really, they grasped then what is now realized fully, that once only and never again that offering had to be made.

In the Book of Nehemiah we read that the people kept the Feast with great gladness.

The note of the Lord's Table is gratitude and gladness. Gladness for our own sake; redeemed not with silver or gold but with the precious blood of Christ. Gladness for His sake, that His blood need never be shed again.

To be present at the Lord's Table is *good*. The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and God's secret is fellowship with Himself and fellowship with one another through Jesus Christ. To be present at the Lord's Table is good, for it is a sacrament, and a sacrament is the oath that the citizen soldier takes that he will be loyal to his country and his King. Our citizenship is in Heaven. Knowing as we do know how imperfectly these vows have been kept in the past, we make them again to-day. We seal them with this sacrament, remembering that the bread and the wine are the symbols of the life that we now live, and pledging

ourselves in the name of Christ to implicit obedience.

To come in that spirit is communion indeed, and truly it will be "good for us to be here".

CHAPTER VIII

GOOD FRIDAY

"Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?"—LUKE xxiv. 26.

OUGHT not Christ to have suffered these things? Was it not the practical thing that He should suffer these things, the only way in which the task of His life could be accomplished? Was it not inevitable that the Crown should be preceded by the Cross?

This morning, as we gather about this Holy Table, our thoughts gather about the meaning of His sufferings in the light of the question put by Jesus Himself to two disciples on the way to Emmaus. One of these was Cleopas; the other is unnamed, unknown. Like all the other disciples, these men were overwhelmed with grief.

Now grief loves to be alone, and yet not wholly alone. The only companionship grief cares for is that of a fellow-creature who understands and shares in the same sorrow.

For these men Jerusalem was no longer tolerable; the city was crowded, seething with excitement; they must have quiet, and they must be alone. Both things they

would find in the bosom of nature. How is it that grief finds such solace in nature? Is it not that the Maker of nature and of human nature is one and the same, and the heart of man feels that oneness, and by its own instincts knows that "behind the iron ribs of nature there beats the heart of God." Emmaus lay to the north-west of Jerusalem, about seven miles. It was a perfect evening walk. The sun set in golden glory as they set their faces toward Emmaus.

Somewhere on the way they were joined by a stranger; no stranger indeed, but one whom, because of something in Him—for the Resurrection body was sublimed, etherealized—and because of something in them—for vision is not good when the eye is dimmed with tears—they failed to recognize. "What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad?" The question amazed them. The only topic on every lip was the Crucifixion. "Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days?"

Jesus said, "What things?" No one knew better, but He knew also that the best balm for grief was an open, interested, sympathetic ear. The question was like the opening of a sluice, from which the flood of their sorrow came racing and tumbling faster

than they could find words to express it. "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him. But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel." More amazing still, "certain women made us astonished which were early at the sepulchre; and when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive. And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulchre, and found it even so as the women had said: but him they saw not."

They paused for breath, ready to race off again at the next question, but Jesus intervened. "Oh, foolish men, and slow of heart to believe. Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?" Was it not the will of Jehovah as revealed in your own Scriptures that he should thus suffer and die? And beginning with Moses, and passing down the long corridor of revelation with the superb ease that came from a perfect mastery of the written word, He expounded to them the things concerning Himself.

That the passion and the death of Jesus Christ were the fulfilment of the Messianic

conception of the suffering servant of the Old Testament is beyond question, but this morning afresh, in the light of the Resurrection, in the light of the Church and its history, in the light of our own experience, we put this question again, "Was it not the practical thing, the only way in which the issues of redemptive experience could be reached, that Jesus should thus suffer and die?" Was there any alternative, any other possible way?

One other way did indeed offer itself. On the threshold of His public ministry, immediately after His baptism, He was carried to the top of a lofty mountain—no literal, material mountain; for what mountain is so lofty that all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them could be seen from its summit?—but a lofty place in thought and imagination, where the Tempter met Him, and said, "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." No literal act of adoration; no ritual of genuflexion, but that kind of worship which alone is real, the acceptance of the will and the way of Him to whom our will is surrendered.

What, then, was the will and the way of the Tempter? It was the world's way, the way of every great empire, Assyria and Persia and Greece and Rome, the way of force, of the sword, by which their empires

were established and maintained. "You have come to found a kingdom. If you are the Son of God, the power is yours. Take it and use it! Bring the nations to heel. Found an empire coextensive with the human race."

That such an offer should prove a real temptation to Jesus seems difficult to believe; every principle of it ran counter to the principles of Christianity, as we know them now. Yes, but two things must be remembered: that Jesus was a child of His time and race, and it was just a Messiah like that His people expected—a field-marshal, a world conqueror, whose weapon was the sword; we must remember also that a kingdom founded on faith and love and sacrificial suffering was unique, unknown in the history of the world.

"Tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin." The New Testament stresses nothing more than this, that the temptations of Jesus were real. For one moment the prize of world-empire glittered before His eyes, but only for a moment.

> "'Tis one thing to be tempted, Escalus;
> 'Tis another thing to fall."

"Behind me, Satan," he cried; "get thee behind me, for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." There, on that high place,

the path of the world's Redemption was determined, the "Via Dolorosa"—the Way of Grief and of the Cross.

What is it, then, in the Cross of Christ that constitutes its redeeming power? What is it in the Cross or about it, that led a mighty nature like Paul to exclaim, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ"? What is it that makes it the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth?

Now, first of all, as a fact of experience, there is moral power in suffering, when it is rightly received. "Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward," but sparks from the furnace of affliction do fly upward. Suffering cleanses, purifies, sanctifies. Suffering is God's furnace, by which the ore of human life is smelted and separated from its alloys and impurities.

> "Life is not as idle ore,
> But metal dug from central gloom,
> And heated hot with burning fears,
> And dipped in baths of hissing tears,
> And battered with the shocks of doom
> To shape and use."

Suffering awakens and develops the nobler attributes of human nature. "Without pain," says Browning, "there would be neither sympathy with man, nor gratitude to God." For it is only as men and women suffer themselves that their sympathy with others can

be real; and it is only in deliverance from the pang of pain that gratitude awakens for the goodness of God.

Suffering is soul wealth: it deepens thought; it broadens sympathy; it enriches the soul.

> "Measure thy life by loss and not by gain,
> Not by the wine drunk, but by the wine poured forth,
> For love's strength lieth in love's sacrifice,
> And he that suffers most hath most to give."

The power of suffering, moreover, reaches its highest when suffering is vicarious. One man risks his life for another—how often it was done during the war!—and he succeeds in saving it, but he himself dies in the effort, or is disabled for life. In that saved life, the strongest force for ever after will be gratitude to him by whom it was saved.

Vicarious suffering reaches its climax of power when it is voluntary, the offering of love and goodwill. The story I repeat now is well known, but of those illustrations and analogies to the Cross known to me, I know nothing better. A mother and child sat together one day, when the child said, "Mother, I love you. I love your face, your eyes and your hair, but I do not love your hands. How is it that your hands are so strange, so discoloured, so wrinkled and drawn?" The mother answered, "Years ago, my child, when you were a babe, this house was on fire. I ran to your room and

found your cot ablaze. I put my hands into the burning clothes and pulled you out of them unscathed, but, in doing so, my hands were burned to the bone. That is why they are so unseemly, so wrinkled and discoloured." The child wept, and said, "Mother, I love you all, but I love your hands the best".

Lead that up to Jesus Christ: "He showed them his hands and his feet." Lead it up to God. "Ah," but you say, "does God really suffer? Does he not live always in the calm of unbroken joy?" Surely, men and women, if that be our only thought of God, we think amiss.

What is God like? He is like Jesus Christ. Christ is God mirrored on earth. He was one with the Father; and who else can be named that entered so deeply, so really, into the sufferings of mankind? More than once we read of Him, that He groaned in spirit and wept; but if Christ be one with God, these groans and tears came from the heart of the Eternal.

> "There is no place where earth's sorrows
> Are more felt than up in heaven;
> There is no place where earth's failings
> Have such kindly judgment given."

One with us in sorrow, God in Christ is one with us also in our sin. To my mind, the deepest and most significant words of the

New Testament are these, "He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin". The Cross of Jesus Christ is God's grief for the sin of the world. The proof of it lies in the Resurrection. Through the Cross and the Resurrection, Christ is the power of God unto salvation.

What precisely does that mean? What means it for me? Looking back to-day on many years of life, I feel that failure is written across it like large letters on a map. I have done wrong, not once, but times innumerable. I have lost golden opportunities of sanctification and of service. If God were strict to mark iniquity, what answer could I give for one of a thousand of my sins?

Now I know that. In my best moments, I am most deeply conscious of it. God knows it absolutely and always; but in Christ Jesus He says to me, "I know it no more. Your sins are blotted out as a thick cloud. I remember them no more. Every transgression you have committed, every obligation in which you have failed, I have taken on my heart, and carried it away in that atonement, which is eternal like myself: the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." Is not that message good news? Is it not a gospel in whose shadow and shelter we can sit and rest at this Table and drink deep of divine love?

It is told of Matthew Arnold that his last Sunday on earth was spent in his sister's house at Liverpool. He had been present at a communion service conducted by "Ian Maclaren" in Sefton Park Church. One of the hymns sung was, "When I survey the wondrous Cross". That afternoon, in deep thought, he slowly paced up and down the drawing-room, repeating the words of the hymn. "The greatest verse in the English language," he said, and repeated it again :

> "When I survey the wondrous Cross
> On which the Prince of Glory died,
> My richest gain I count but loss,
> And pour contempt on all my pride."

CHAPTER IX

EASTER COMMUNION

"If Christ be not risen."—1 Cor. xv. 14.

Some years ago, before the war, a book was written by Guy Thorne in which, by way of allegory, the author tells of a man who took part in excavation work in Palestine, and there, among other things, an inscription was unearthed which proved authoritatively and conclusively that Jesus Christ had not risen from the dead. The rest of the book is occupied with the emotions of triumph on the part of some, despair on the part of others, with which the news of this discovery was received when it was broadcasted over the world.

Now, in inviting your attention to this great theme and in making some demand on your thought, let me first of all tell you my own position in regard to it. Curious is it not, that one preaching from a Christian pulpit, whose creed in its central and supreme doctrines is regarded as definitely fixed in accordance with the teaching of the New Testament, should find it necessary or at least expedient to say what he believes?

In these days, however, when many confess their belief in the Resurrection, a belief which, when examined, is found to be a naturalistic explanation or idealistic interpretation of it, such a declaration is by no means irrelevant or uncalled for.

Whole-heartedly, then, with no reservation, no qualification, I believe in the literal, physical Resurrection of Jesus Christ. I believe in the empty tomb. The body of Christ's risen life on the earth after the Resurrection was the same as the body before the Resurrection. Its identity, on the authority of the Gospels, was proved by the five wounds which Christ showed to Thomas and to the other disciples, but it was different in some of its attributes. It was sublimed, spiritualized; a difference to which we can offer no known analogy, but which corresponds no doubt to the distinction drawn by the Apostle when he said, "There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body."

My faith is identical with that of the Apostle when he said, "For I delivered unto you that which I also received, how that first of all Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures."

That event is unique in the history of man-

kind, differing not only in degree, but in kind, from any other recorded resurrection, like that, *e.g.*, of Lazarus, or the daughter of Jairus, or the son of the widow of Nain, for the bodies of these people were resuscitated by a power from without, but the body of Jesus rose by a power inherent in His own Person, a living force that could not be holden of death.

If, moreover, that event is historic, its significance is so tremendous that we do not wonder that Paul makes it a test of saving faith, coupling it as he does along with the confession of the name of Christ as the two pillars on which a saving faith rests: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

"If Christ be not risen," what then? The alternative is unthinkable; but if some discovery were made by which it were proved beyond question that the New Testament belief and record of the Resurrection is a mistake, what difference would it make to faith and life? To my mind—for this is a question of individual conviction—it would mean the overthrow of the credibility of the gospel narrative, a demolition so complete that nothing of the supernatural element in the life of Jesus would remain. Along with

that would go the Saviourhood of Jesus Christ; for humanity alone, however complete, however perfect, is "a rope that is not long enough for the redemption of the world."

In 1894–98, Adolf Harnack, one of the most prolific and stimulating of modern critical scholars—a scholar with a deep reverence for the Person of Christ and a belief in Christianity as a social gospel, but one who stumbles at the miraculous element in Christ, and rejects it—published his *History of Dogma*, and his *What is Christianity?* In these volumes he draws a distinction between the Easter Message—the record, namely, of the event that took place in the Garden of Joseph of Arimathæa, "which", he says, "nobody saw", and in which he does not believe—and the Easter Faith, namely, "that the Crucified still lives, that God is just and powerful, and that the First-born from the dead still lives".

Now, quite frankly, to the ordinary mind the logic of that distinction is difficult to follow. To most minds the Easter Faith and the Easter Message are one and the same; for what else can an Easter Faith—a faith rooted in the past—rest upon, but the fact that Jesus rose from the dead? To say that Jesus still lives, but to say also that there

was no Resurrection is nothing more than to say that Abraham or Moses or Mohammed still lives, nothing more than to declare one's faith in the survival of the soul after the death of the body.

What remains, then, of the supernatural element in the life of Jesus? What difference in kind is there between our faith and any other world-religion?

"Ah, then," it may be said, "His miracles of help and healing still remain." Theoretically the Resurrection and the miracles of Jesus do not stand or fall together, but practically they do. In other words, faith in the Resurrection of Christ is the keystone to faith in the New Testament teaching on the Person of Jesus Christ.

In the ancient city of Baalbek, in the ruins of its mighty temple stands a glorious gateway, one of the finest in the world. In 1875, it was seen that the keystone of the arch of that gateway was loose, and threatened to fall. The British Consul in Syria, a lover of the antique and the beautiful, after long and vexatious negotiations with the Turkish Government, was permitted to prop it up with masonry and to make it secure. But for his laudable efforts that keystone and the gateway itself would long since have fallen into ruins. To take out the keystone of the Resurrection of

Christ is to destroy the credibility of the Gospels.

On the death of the late and great Marquis of Salisbury, a letter appeared which he had written to a clergyman whose faith in Christ had been shaken, and who wrote to the Marquis, then Prime Minister of England, asking him where he rested his faith. The answer, which was received by return of post, contained these words, "I rest my faith on the Resurrection of Christ, which I believe".

One thing at all events is certain, that the distinction between an Easter message and an Easter faith was wholly unknown to the Apostles and to the writers of the New Testament. The content of their faith admits of no question. Strauss himself, the most destructive of rationalistic writers, does not question it. "According to all the Gospels," he writes, "Jesus was buried on the evening of Friday, lay in the grave over Saturday" (the Jewish Sabbath), "and rose on Sunday, the first day of the week." But that record Strauss does not believe. To believe that would mean the confession of the supernatural in the life of Jesus—the last thing that Strauss would admit.

Significant indeed is the mental history of Strauss with regard to this doctrine. In his earlier writings, he maintains that the

issues of the Christian faith remain independent of his criticism, that "the Birth of Jesus, His Miracles, His Passion, His Resurrection, His Ascension remain as eternal truths, whatever may be said about their historical reality".

Once again the logic of that argument is difficult, impossible to follow. It is a house built on sand. In the course of a few years his position gravitated downward to its inevitable issue. In *The Old Faith and the New* he puts the question, "Are we, then, yet Christian?" To which, definitely and boldly, he answers, "No". The keystone of the arch had fallen out, the structure hanging for months, years, unstable, threatening to fall. Another year passed; another book was published; the gateway lay in ruins.

"If Christ be not risen"! To the Apostle the issues were central, vital, supreme, and these issues are marshalled one after the other in the passage that follows.

"If Christ be not risen," then our preaching is vain; it goes for nothing; and your faith goes for nothing, for the faith of the Church at Corinth and every other rested on the witness of the Apostles; and the witness of the Apostles rested on the Resurrection of Christ. The bottom of the vessel has fallen out, its content has vanished. "If

Christ is not risen," then we are deceivers, and we are found out, for we have staked everything on this—that He rose from the dead.

"If Christ be not risen," your faith is vain, and ye are yet in your sins; for the death of Jesus was no ordinary decease; it was a death of unique significance for God and man and for the sin of the world; and the evidence centres round His Resurrection from the dead. "If Christ be not risen, then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished." Does that argument still hold? Are there not now as never before evidences, natural evidences, that the soul survives after death? Without entering into the validity of these evidences, granting for the moment that they are valid, what proof is there that the state after death, like that before it, is not mortal? What natural evidence can be given that the spirit shall live in the power of an endless life?

Samuel Johnson tells us how Rasselas visited a philosopher who told him how he might subdue his passions and overcome his trials without any difficulty. Soon after, he visited the same philosopher again, and found him wringing his hands in despair.

"Whence this grief?" said Rasselas.

"Oh," he cried, "my only daughter, the

light of my eyes, the comfort of my home, is dead."

"But surely," said Rasselas, "the philosophy on which you descanted so eloquently the other day will comfort you now."

"No, no," he answered; "what can philosophy do but show me that my state is inevitable and incurable?"

Rasselas went and told Imlac, and he said, "Oh yes, these philosophers preach like angels, but they live like men."

If, men and women, in the Providence of God one of the deeper sorrows of life fell on you, if husband or wife or dearly loved child were taken from you, and if I or any other minister visited you, what comfort could I bring? What consolation would help you but this, that the same Christ stands near to you in tender sympathy as stood beside Martha and Mary and said, "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die"; the same Christ that the seer of Patmos saw and heard, saying, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death".

"Ah," but one replies, "life eternal is an article of faith, and I cannot believe."

In Goethe's *Faust* the most touching incident is when the sceptic, sunk in despair, with the goblet of poison within reach of his hands, suddenly hears the Easter bells and Easter songs of praise.

"Ah yes, I hear your message, but I have not faith. Miracle is Faith's most cherished child."

Is there, then, any argument by which that faith may be created? No argument, no marshalling of evidence and argument that I know of. Faith is the gift of God. But that gift is given. Will any one tell me that he has no faith in life after death? I cannot believe it. He may speak sincerely, but he speaks mistakenly. Every human heart in its essentials is framed on the same pattern, and when I look into my heart and listen, I hear a voice that whispers:

> "Thou wilt not leave me in the dust;
> Thou madest man, he knows not why;
> He feels he was not made to die,
> And Thou hast made him, Thou art just."

That any Being, whom we call God, should create human life and sustain it for a few imperfect years and blow it out like an extinguished candle, is not possible to believe. Of that faith the proof and the seal is the Resurrection of Christ, nay, verily, it is Christ Himself who by His Spirit quickens that faith into a living flame, by the light and

vital heat of which we say with the Apostle, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day".

CHAPTER X

THE MINIMUM AND MAXIMUM OF FAITH

"My Lord and my God."—JOHN XX. 28.

IN every act of life, more especially in religious worship, and above all in the supreme moment of our worship, the Table of the Lord, every man and woman wants to be real. Whatever else may be said for or against our generation, there is among us a desire, if not a passion, for reality. To that end, at this Table we put the question: What is the central reality of the Christian life? What is the minimum of faith with which one may worthily partake at the Table of the Lord?

That question is not superfluous. In these days of intellectual and spiritual unrest, where in a sister Church one dignitary under the constraint of conscience proclaims certain views in our great national Cathedral, and another dignitary under the same constraint rises and protests earnestly and indignantly; when leaders of the Church array themselves on opposite sides, and the body of the people, perplexed and bewildered, ask about our

Bible, and about the Sacrament, what are we to believe? Is it not well for the clearing of our minds and the quietening of our hearts that we put the question: "What is the minimum of faith with which we may come acceptably to the Table of the Lord?"

Many years ago that question was put to a prince in Israel, one of our supreme thinkers and teachers, and his reply was, "The central reality of Christianity is a faith by which one calls Jesus Master and Lord. To be able to call him Lord means that you are a Christian, for," he continued, quoting from John, "no man calleth Jesus Lord save by the Holy Ghost."

That Thomas was a worthy communicant after his great confession goes without saying. The content of his faith was full when he said, "My Lord and my God". But Thomas was present at the Lord's Supper in the Upper Room, and there his faith was far from complete. Is it possible for any one to communicate worthily if there be doctrines of our faith that one does not perhaps deny, but which one does not understand? To answer that question we centre our thought on the spiritual history of Thomas the Doubter.

There are three occasions on which, apart from his call, Thomas appears in the records

of the New Testament: the first was on the other side of the Jordan; the second was in the Upper Room; and the third was eight days after the Resurrection, in all probability in the same Upper Room. All three curiously occur only in the Gospel of John. John and Thomas have something in common, and that something is not difficult to guess. These events, moreover, are focussed about the Cross. Not more than three weeks passed between the first and the last.

1. The first was the other side of Jordan, the spot where John baptized, and to which Jesus repaired for safety because his hour was not yet come. It was there that the message came, "He whom thou lovest is sick"; there that Jesus waited two days and then said, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may wake him out of sleep"; there that the disciples protested insistently against His going to Jerusalem. "Master," they said, "the Jews of late sought to stone thee, and goest thou thither again?" there also, when they found every protest futile, that Thomas said, "Let us also go and die with him".

Thomas the Doubter! What was the nature of his doubt? It went very deep; it was very vital. He doubted the Messiahship of Jesus Christ. "If he go to Jerusalem,

he walks into the lion's mouth, he will certainly die," but a suffering and dying Messiah to Thomas and the other disciples was inconceivable; the only kind of Messiah in whom they could believe was a reigning, conquering king. Is it possible that a person with a doubt like that could worthily communicate?

For a Christian believer, Thomas's doubt is no longer possible, but every age has its own doubt and difficulty. Some doubts are perennial. For one man there is the problem of the origin of evil; for another the intellectual problem of the Trinity, or the Person of Christ; for another it is Miracles or the Atonement or the Resurrection of the body, or it may be Creation and Evolution. Now we put a case. There is some mind in this house in which some of these doctrines are not clear, hardly intelligible it may be; may such an one worthily communicate? Assuredly he may. On that question I have no doubt, for Christianity in its reality is not a body of doctrines. It is a life. Are we living the life? That life, moreover, is a certain attitude toward Christ, and that attitude is this: "Jesus Christ is the kind of life in which I believe, the life I admire, the life on which I pin my faith, the life I look upon as my example and ideal, the life to whose imitation I definitely and whole-

heartedly commit my own. Jesus Christ is my Master and Lord. He is of course much more. Son of God, Second Person in the Trinity—things I cannot well understand, but I see and know and believe in His perfect life". To get there is surely to be justified in coming to the Lord's Table. To come there, moreover, is to be in the path in which doubts are dissolved. "Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness". He that willeth to do the will of God shall know of the doctrine.

Thomas was a great doubter, but he was a great lover, "Let us also go and die with him." Precious metal rings in these words, the fine gold of love. What is the supreme criterion of love? You know that lovely story of Damon and Pythias, how Damon was condemned to die, and Pythias stood hostage for him while he visited his home, and the limit of absence had expired, and Pythias prayed only that Damon would be detained and would not arrive in time, but Damon appeared on the horizon galloping on his foam-flecked steed, and Pythias still begged to be allowed to die for him. Damon refused, and then Pythias begged of the tyrant one favour, that he might die along with him, till that heart of stone was moved, and cried, "Live, O incomparable pair! May I be worthy of your friendship".

Two souls wedded together in love, husband and wife they may be, friend and friend, so wedded that one feels life is not worth having if the other is gone. That was Thomas's love for Jesus. "Let us also go and die with him." Great doubter, but great lover. For a love like that there is always a place, a big place, at the Table of the Lord.

2. The second occasion, a few days after, on which we read of Thomas is in the Upper Room. Very clearly, definitely, Jesus warns them that His departure is now very near, and then, as if to test them, He said, "Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know." Thomas saith unto Him, "Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?" Doubt, deep doubt, darkness, even unto despair, not simply about Jesus but about himself. His own future was bound up with that of Jesus Christ. On the future of Christ's life on earth he had no light, and therefore he had none upon his own. What a desperate mood for the Lord's Table! And yet it was in that mood, deep darkness, despair about the future, that Thomas sat at the first Table of the Lord. Is it possible that a man or woman in that mood can worthily communicate? The answer is this: Thomas, I am sure, was one of the most welcome guests at the Table.

May we not say indeed that while the Table is for all, it is spread specially for these? What is the essential condition of true communicating? Is it not the sense of need? They that be whole need not a physician, but they that be sick. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled. Some feel their lack of strength, they come in conscious weakness; but to them that believe, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. They believe it, they eat, they find strength. Some come in deep sorrow; but to them that believe, Christ is the Comforter; they believe it, they eat, they find comfort. Some come in much darkness, darkness about themselves, about others, about the present or the future, but to them that believe, Christ is the Light of life. They believe and eat, and they find light.

Some come with a deep sense of unworthiness, but to them that believe, Christ is the Propitiation, and they believe and eat and find pardon and peace.

"I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

3. The third occasion was eight days after the Resurrection. On the day of the Resurrection, when the disciples met, Thomas was not present. I know where he was. To a certainty, Thomas was away somewhere

alone, indulging to the full the glooms of his despair. Meeting him afterwards, the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe." Doubt again, but there was more; there was obstinacy, there was wilfulness, the determination not to believe unless his conditions were fulfilled. But Christ, knowing his great love, making allowance for his doubt, came down to his own level, to the test of the senses, and stretching out His hand said, "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing." Thomas fell on his knees and said, "My Lord and my God." The cloud at last was dispelled. The sun shone in noonday splendour.

Now, this morning, we have considered the minimum of faith for communicating, let us look for a moment at the maximum.

We find it in Thomas. "My Lord and my God." That is faith at its highest. Faith can go no further. The climax of Christian faith is, Jesus Christ is God. To find that faith, moreover, is to find the richest treasure and the happiest hour in one's life.

Hegel tells us that the goal of life is self-realization. He is perfectly right, only that

goal is impossible in oneself; self can be realized only in God. That realization is soul fulfilment, soul satisfaction. People tell us nowadays that we must not say, "Jesus is God". We must use some qualifying phrase. He is God in so far as God can be incarnate in the flesh. There is truth in that of course, but, for myself, I am content to take the words of Jesus Himself, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father".

This morning, at this Table, we worship Him as God, and it is just there that our souls find complete satisfaction, for man is made for worship, and the being that we worship must be God. Nothing less can suffice, and in Jesus Christ we have found God, and we have found that the God in whom we believe is a Father, a God, whom we can love as well as worship and adore.

Some of you remember the two great Robertsons of the United Presbyterian Church — Robertson of Newington and Robertson of Irvine, the preacher and poet of the Church. Hymn 123 in the old *Church Hymnary* is one of his, and this is one of its verses—not perhaps great poetry, but great truth:

> "Jesus is God! let sorrow come,
> And pain, and every ill;
> All are worth while, for all are means
> His glory to fulfil.

And what to us the single end
Of this life's mortal span,
Except to glorify the God
Who for our sakes was Man ? "

CHAPTER XI

TWELVE HOURS IN THE DAY—ARMISTICE DAY COMMUNION

"Are there not twelve hours in the day?"—JOHN xi. 9.

THE text from which this meditation begins is John xi. 9: "Are there not twelve hours in the day?" The text to which the study of it has led me is Rev. i. 5, 6: "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever".

To open the door of our being wide to receive a fresh inflow of the spirit of our Master in each of His incomparable attributes—His faith in the Fatherhood of God, strong enough for every test of life; His perfect love to God and to man; His glad acceptance of God's will and implicit obedience to it—to reach a more complete oneness with our Lord—that is the object of every act of communion. Now, so far as God's will is concerned, and the spirit in which it should be accepted and accomplished, no words are known to me in which complete acceptance of it can be better expressed than

these: "Are there not twelve hours in the day?"

To discover for ourselves the meaning of these words, to apprehend their spiritual content, and to make that content the governing principle of our life—nothing could help us more towards a deep and real oneness with the spirit of our Lord.

To understand these words, we must note carefully the circumstances in which they were spoken.

The place was the other side of Jordan, near the spot where John baptized—a place of seclusion and comparative security to which Jesus had betaken Himself when His implacable enemies sought to seize Him and stone Him to death. To that spot came the message from Bethany, "He whom thou lovest is sick". For two days that message seemed to be ignored—days of waiting by which the faith of Martha and Mary was put to a sore test, but by which the site was prepared for the crowning miracle of Jesus' ministry, the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead.

"Let us go unto Judæa again," Jesus said to His disciples. They were taken aback; they protested warmly. To their minds Jesus' announcement was the knell of doom. "Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee, and goest thou thither again?" To go back to Judæa means certain death for

you and most probably also for us. Jesus answered and said, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him." To understand the reference, one must go back in imagination to the days of our Lord, when the streets were narrow, crooked, ill-paved, unlit, except for the moon or the stars, and the pedestrian could walk without stumbling only in the light of day.

Now the only meaning of day and daylight in this passage is life itself in the path of duty, and the teaching of the passage is that life is immortal till duty is finished, but life is complete the moment that the will of God has been accomplished.

That doctrine is high; it is not easy to attain to it. In our cemeteries, not so often now as formerly, but occasionally still, the stone over a grave is a broken pillar, the symbol meaning that the life of which the stone is the memorial was broken in two, cut off as a tale that is not told.

A broken pillar is not a deep or real interpretation of life. If, indeed, there has been any life, on a surface interpretation of it, over which a broken pillar might fittingly be raised, it was that of our Lord Himself. He

was cut off at the age of thirty-three. The sun of His life had not reached noonday. The work for which He had come to the world, the inauguration of the kingdom of God, was not only unfinished; it seemed barely begun. The disciples on whose shoulders the burden of Jesus' task now fell were humble fishermen, into whose minds some of the central principles of the kingdom had been instilled, whose reverence and love for their Master had grown into a life-passion, but whose courage and faith were so unstable that in the hour of test they all forsook Him and fled. And yet Jesus spoke primarily of His own life when He said, "Are there not twelve hours in the day?" 'As years go I am still young, but God's will for me has been almost accomplished. In the reckoning of Heaven I have had my twelve hours.'

Some years ago, a minister, known to me, returned to his first charge in the North. A message reached him that a young woman lay dying, and desired to speak with him.

"Do you remember," she said, "preaching a sermon on the words, 'Are there not twelve hours in the day?'" *She* remembered, and continued, "I live on that word. I am only thirty years of age, and I am dying. The sands of my life are nearly run out, but," she

added, with a look of ineffable contentment and peace, "I thank God; I have had my twelve hours". Jesus Christ spoke again that day in one of His dear disciples. Life may be measured by the standard of earth, or by the standard of Heaven. The longest life by the standard of earth is incomplete; the shortest is barely begun. By the standard of Heaven the hour hand has gone its full round, and twelve has been struck, the moment God's will for that life has been done.

You think to-day, and so do I, of your brave sons cut off in the Great War. If they could speak to us now, they would say, "Do not mourn for us. Our task was accomplished; we had our twelve hours."

To believe that, to rest upon it as a basal principle of life, is a supreme act of faith, and it is just there that Jesus is our perfect example and inspiration; there, that in the thought of life cut down suddenly, prematurely, we desire to drink deep of His great faith at this sacred Table.

We note, moreover, that Jesus' faith is another word for His life.

One of the problems of our day is to find a form of words, brief but comprehensive, in which the central verities of our faith might be expressed. Many attempts have been made. One of the best and briefest is that of the late Principal Denney: "I believe in

God, through Jesus Christ His only Son, my Saviour and Lord". The Fatherhood of God in Jesus Christ; the Saviourhood and the Lordship of Jesus Christ—to believe that, and to confess it with lip and with life—that surely is everything.

Now in this question of a form of words in which faith might be confessed, we might look for help from Jesus Himself. What did He believe? To ask that question is to open one's eyes to the fact that, so far as we know, Jesus made no confession of faith. He never uttered the words, "I believe". His faith was His life. When He taught His disciples to say, "Our Father which art in heaven"—that was His creed. When He went about doing good, helping and healing, proclaiming God's love and forgiveness, calling the Nathanaels to the intimate circle of His disciples, but calling also the most sinful and degraded, breathing new life, new faith, new courage into their souls—that was His creed. When He set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem, knowing perfectly what He must suffer—that was His creed. When His own will was submitted to the will of God so perfectly that when God's hour had not come, nothing must be done; but when the hour had struck, nothing on earth could keep Him from finishing His task—that was His creed.

Jesus was God incarnate in the flesh.

> "And so the Word had breath, and wrought
> With human hands the creed of creeds
> In loveliness of perfect deeds,
> More fair than all poetic thought."

Faith as a form of words—that weighs but little. Faith incarnate in life—that is the faith for which we pray.

Now faith like that can have only one foundation. Faith in a person is always grounded in love. There is some man or woman, more than one it may be, but one supremely, in whom whole-heartedly, glowingly, you say you believe. That faith is religious—not indeed the same faith you put in Jesus Christ, but the same in kind. It is not only that you put implicit confidence in their word, but their life is the life you believe in, and you admire them and love them for it. Jesus believed in God because He loved Him. One with God in every attribute of His Being, Justice, Holiness, Love, He could do no other.

Now a congregation of communicants is a gathering of people who love the Lord Jesus Christ; but every honest communicant craves for reality, and to that end he or she puts the question: "Do I really love Jesus Christ?"

Love is distinct and different from every other emotion. It is not the same as gratitude. You may be grateful to one you do not love. It is not the same as reverence.

You may reverence a cold perfectness you cannot love. Love is that kinship of soul, that oneness of conviction and sympathy in which the same objects and ideals are believed in, admired and cherished; and so when in the spirit of self-examination we put the question, "Do I love Jesus?" the question is this: "Do I love what Jesus was and is, what He stands for eternally? Do I love purity and holiness?" The question is not: "Have I fully attained?" The greatest of all the Apostles confessed that he had not attained. He was not "perfected"; but is holiness the ideal I cherish, the goal towards which I strive and pray, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those which are before, and pressing on toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Do I love my fellow-men and sister-women? Am I eager to help and to serve, sorry only that I cannot or do not do more. Do I accept willingly, gladly, God's will in everything, in the spirit of Faber when he wrote:

"I bow to thee, sweet Will of God,
And all thy ways adore;
And ever as I live, I seem
To love thee more and more.

Ill that He blesses is our good,
And unblest good is ill;
And all is right that seems most wrong,
If it be His sweet Will."

That is the spirit of Jesus Christ, and that is the spirit of which you and I would fain drink to-day.

But if that be truly so, a great thing has happened in our life. We have been born again, our sins have been washed away, the fetters of the thraldom of sin have been broken—He has made us kings in the only kingdom in which man can truly reign, the kingdom of his own life. Kings and priests unto God! And so, this morning, with one heart as with one voice, we unite in the greatest of all doxologies, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

PART III

AFTER THE TABLE (THANKSGIVING)

CHAPTER XII

THINGS THAT ARE NOT

"And things which are not, to bring to nought things that are."—1 Cor. i. 28.

The subject of this passage—one of the central and supreme passages in the Pauline Epistles—is the Cross of Jesus Christ. To the Jew that Cross was a stumbling-block, for the Jew asked for signs. These signs must be the evidence of power—divine power, and the sphere in which they must appear was political, national, military—a mighty field-marshal who by his prowess and skill would break the foreign yoke, and drive the usurper back to his own land. But instead of a world-conqueror, the Jew is offered a humble Carpenter; instead of a throne, he is offered a Cross.

The Cross was the symbol of utter defeat, of humiliation, of public shame. The Jew, moreover, was a literalist in the interpretation of Scripture, and to him the Cross was the sign of the anathema of God—"Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree".

To the Greek the Cross was foolishness, for the Greek sought after wisdom, and the

sphere in which that wisdom must show itself was philosophy—a philosophy of existence and of human life. Instead of a philosophy the Greek was offered a fact—a fact, moreover, that to his mind was meaningless, a fact that to his culture and taste was repelling if not repulsive—a humble Jew dying on a cross. What bearing could that have on the world or on human life? As a key to the problems of existence, the Cross to him was sheer unmitigated folly. "But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks," said the Apostle, "Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God."

The argument of this chapter is climactic. Step by step it rises to its climax, and the climax is found in the words of our text.

Illustration for his argument is found in the known ways of God's Providence in the story of the race. "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are."

Now it is just here that the reader pauses and thinks and questions. At first sight it

does seem as if the Apostle in the ardour of his argument had fallen into the rhetorical lapse of an anticlimax, for if an object does not exist, how can God choose it, and if it be chosen, but non-existent, how can it bring an existing thing to nought? That a man of the calm, clear-thinking calibre of the Apostle should stumble into an anticlimax is inherently improbable. On the contrary, the more closely this passage is studied, the clearer, and the deeper will be found its content of truth.

Now there are three senses, each of them natural and unforced, in which these words may be understood:

1. An object may be non-existent for one person, because he is ignorant of it; to another person it exists, and is operative, because its existence is known. An object or a force may be non-existent for man; it may exist for God.

Of the discoveries of recent years, the best known forces are Radium, the Röntgen Rays, Wireless Telegraphy. For millenniums these forces have been wholly unknown to man, unused by him. From the beginning they were known to Him by whom they were created. How many elemental forces still lie concealed in the bosom of nature known only to God, who shall say?

To the Jew and to the Greek the Cross of

Christ, its truth and its power, were non-existent, because they were unknown. That a humble Nazarene was crucified in the reign of Tiberius, under Pontius Pilate, they would not trouble to question; but what was there in that? For any practical bearing that Calvary had on the meaning of the world or of human life it was *non est*—non-existent. To the Apostle, and to those who believed as he did, Calvary was the crowning event in the world's history—the event for which every previous century was a preparation, and from which every succeeding century flowed as a consequence.

That the Apostle and his fellow-believers were right in their estimate of the Cross, history has abundantly proved. How many haughty, hoary fortresses of evil it has already undermined and overthrown! How many institutions of help and healing it has established! What numberless forces it has liberated and set in operation for the redemption of mankind!

Three years ago the chief cities of Japan were overwhelmed in a great catastrophe—earthquake, volcano, fire. The first helpers to arrive on the scene were members of the Red Cross. That is typical, symbolic. Wherever the need of the human race is most urgent, wherever suffering is direst, there the Cross hastens to its self-appointed task—the

task it loves above all others; wherever tyrannies of evil rear their head, there the Cross is at work, not with the violence of the earthquake, but with the breath of God's spring, melting the glaciers of the world's winter till they flow down in refreshing streams, and fill the valleys with fruits and flowers.

Such things take time, of course. The redemption of the world is slow, but sure. How many centuries of the Christian era had to pass ere the sin of slavery was recognized, and "man's inhumanity to man" gave place to brotherhood and freedom! That movement was led by the Cross! The motives of it were God's Fatherhood and the brotherhood of the race. The movers and leaders in it were all Christian men like William Wilberforce, Christian women like Harriet Beecher Stowe. How many ages had to pass ere the rights of woman, the partner, the helpmeet of man, were recognized! What bondage womanhood lies under still in non-Christian lands! That movement was and is led by the Cross. In Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female, barbarian nor Scythian, bond nor free.

How long it is taking for the world and the Church to learn that the glory of life lies not in ruling but in serving! That lesson is being learned only now. That movement

was and is led by the Cross. "He that is greatest among you shall be the servant of all."

One would fain speak worthily of the triumphs of the Cross of Christ at home and abroad, but what tongue or pen can record them? Wherever it has come, light has penetrated world-darkness; liberty has overthrown world-bondage; hatred and war have given place to love and to peace. In our great cities, in the darkest places, halls of help and healing have been opened like stars in the night. Hospitals, homes, orphanages, asylums of refuge have flung open their doors to suffering, sinning humanity. Our great infirmaries, what are they but the spirit of Christ crystallized in stone! Wherever the Cross has come, men and women have banded themselves together under the noblest banner, the help and the healing of mankind. To the Jew and the Greek the Cross was non-existent. To the Apostle it was the power of God unto salvation, and the Apostle was right.

2. Some things are non-existent, because they have not yet come into being. They will be, but they are not yet. The main content of these words in the mind of the Apostle is, doubtless, that which we have already expounded, but this also may well have been part of it. One of these forces,

non-existent now, but coming into being, is future generations—men and women still to be born. Future generations are the reserves of God's army. The Church of Jesus Christ is like a succession of great armies. These armies are successive generations—each army advancing a little, then ageing, wearying, fading away, giving place to another.

To our minds the progress of the race is painfully, pitifully slow. Great sins, national, individual—Drink, Gambling, Covetousness, Impurity—rear their heads as defiantly as ever, and we are tempted to cry, "How long, O Lord; how long ere the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ?"

"Where is Thy reign of peace
And purity and love?
When shall all hatred cease,
As in the realms above?

When comes the promised time
That war shall be no more,
And lust, oppression, crime,
Shall flee Thy face before?"

"In your patience ye shall win your souls."

In our impatience we forget great truths. To our brief, finite lives a day seems as a thousand years. To the timeless Creator a thousand years are as one day. In our calculations we leave out the divine essential

factor—we leave out God. The Lord God Almighty reigneth. God is righteousness, and the forces of righteousness are omnipotent and eternal. Greater is he that is for us than all they that can be against us. We forget also that God's reserves are not yet in the field—the men and women that are yet unborn. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith," and faith is justified of all her children:

> "Right is right, since God is God,
> And right the day must win;
> To doubt would be disloyalty,
> To falter would be sin."

3. Some things exist potentially but not actually, but the potential may become real.

What potentialities there are in your life and mine! What men and women we might be if every power were fully liberated and energized by the Spirit of God! To believe in Jesus Christ is to believe that the best is yet to be, but the day of life passes quickly, and night approaches, and the question arises—How are the potentialities of life to be realized?

The first thing is vision. "Where there is no vision, the people perish." Every life has vision of a kind, but the perspective is too short, too often it is bounded by the horizon of time. Vision in its reality and plenitude is the vision of God; the goal of

that vision is the kingdom of God in the world and, first of all, in our own life.

By what means, then, can that vision be caught and kept and become the motive power of our life? By what means does a great artist capture the vision of a perfect landscape he desires to paint? He does not catch it at all. He gazes on the purple hills and the green valleys and the sun setting in golden glory, and the vision *captures him* and holds him till the skilled hand produces the picture imprinted on the heart.

The purest heart cannot capture the vision of God, it can only reflect it, but God captures *it*. The truest, boldest spirit cannot capture Christ, but Christ captures *him* and holds him in His sweet thrall. And then things happen. The impossible becomes the possible actual; sin withers up in the vision of holiness. The garments of sin are not rent from us—that is beyond human power—they fall from us. The dry channels of the soul are filled, flooded, thrilled with life—and that life is Jesus Christ.

But that life must have a beginning, and that beginning is a definite committal. Many years ago, a young lad, the son of missionaries, volunteered for the Boer War. He was a decent, clean-living lad, but he had made no life-decision, and his parents, after much speaking and prayer, failed to lead him to it.

"Will you go and see your cousin?" they said. "I shall," he replied. After some earnest, tender talk the lad was deeply moved, and said, "Will you pray for me?" "Certainly," replied his cousin; "but you must tell me what I shall say." "Tell God," he said, "that I am committed." Then on their knees the transaction was done, for God had chosen things that are not, to bring to nought things that are.

CHAPTER XIII

BACK TO BETHEL

"Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there; and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee."—GEN. xxxv. 1.

THE mainland of the Orkney Islands, the largest island of the group, is known as Pomona. At the north-west corner of Pomona stands a little island, which is known as the Broch of Birsay. It is a large rock with a few acres of pasture, and the only living beings upon it are a few score of sheep, rowed over in boats for the summer season and brought back in winter.

The Broch at high tide is an island, but there was a time when it was a peninsula, connected with the mainland by a narrow neck of rock. In the march of the centuries the white horses of the Atlantic came galloping along and beat it with their hoofs and bit through it, till now it is an island, although it is still possible at ebb-tide to cross to it dry-shod over the rocks and screes.

On this island the remains of an old chapel are to be found. The date of it is uncertain, but it must be very old, as old as the time of Columba and his successors in Iona, some of

the inhabitants say; and that is possible, for it is known that Columba's monks penetrated far north, and they may have crossed the Pentland Firth in coracles, as they crossed the Irish Channel to Iona. Some people do not believe in Foreign Missions. Strange, is it not, for where would Britain stand to-day but for the foreign missionaries that dared our inhospitable shores? And what are our marching orders? Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature, baptizing them into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

The chapel on the Broch is now a ruin, only a few feet of walls, overgrown with thistles and nettles; but there was a time when it was the only place of worship in Orkney, and the people came to it from far and near, and the little sanctuary was filled with the voice of prayer and of praise.

Many years ago, when I visited it and heard its story, I said to myself: Here is a parable of the life of Jacob, and of many another life since then. There was one supreme moment in the early manhood of Jacob when God was very real, very near. He was a fugitive from justice. Twice over, pitilessly, shamefully, his elder brother had been outwitted and robbed first of his birthright and then of his blessing. Esau was so maddened with rage and the passion for revenge that if Jacob

had been found he would have paid the penalty with his life. Safety lay in flight. The safest place was the desert, and the first night found him at Luz, in the open air, with a stone for his pillow. While he slept he dreamed. Jacob was a typical Jew, for he could dream, and he could wait.

But this was no ordinary dream. It was a vision, a revelation, a ladder stretching to heaven, with Jehovah at the summit of it, angels ascending and descending upon it. The vision was followed by a voice, the same promise in effect that was given to Abraham. The voice was followed by a whole-hearted vow.

Jacob awoke.

A great awe fell upon him. "How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." Taking the stone pillow, he set it up, poured oil upon it, and registered a great vow that if God would be his God, and give him bread to eat, and raiment to put on, and bring him again to the land of his fathers, this should be his Bethel, and God would have a tithe of all that he possessed.

So far as he knew himself, Jacob was whole-hearted in that vow; his consecration was complete; but alas for human resolves, the best and sincerest! How often, as our great poet has said, they are like tow before a flame,

like words written on water, blotted out almost as they are written!

Twenty years had passed, and that vow had passed into oblivion. Jacob had been with Laban, and Laban was wholly a man of the world. His one ambition was to get on and to get rich. Jacob was a splendid servant, and Laban was not ill-pleased that he should become his son-in-law—a fine match for Leah and Rachel. He seemed, moreover, to be a child of fortune. Everything he touched prospered.

Time passed, however, and Laban became jealous of Jacob. He was forging ahead with uncomfortable celerity. He must be kept in his own place. Ten times the wage contract was changed, each time to the disadvantage of Jacob, and yet he prospered. The two men, keen as mustard, became rivals. It was "diamond cut diamond," and rivalry, when worldly, becomes another name for enmity.

Competition between one man and another is not indeed wrong. On the contrary, it is inherent in human life; it is creational, constitutional, inevitable. Competition is of God. Business men, students, professional men, congregations, ministers must be rivals; they cannot help themselves. Rivalry is inherent in life, and it is innocent. It may call forth the best in men and women; it may call forth the worst. It may be wholly

manly, magnanimous, Christian. Of those evidences of the Christian spirit that men and women may show, few are nobler or more winsome than magnanimity, that grace by which one man or woman does not envy or grudge the success of another, even when it is at the cost of their own—the magnanimity of Jonathan when, in the Providence of God, through no fault of his own, his place as heir-apparent to the throne was filled by another, and he yet loved that other as his own soul; the magnanimity of John the Baptist when his crowded congregations dwindled and went to the services of another, and yet he adored that other, and said, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

That grace is very high, and that test is therefore very hard. One danger is that in the unconscious eagerness of competition, the rules of the road are forgotten, and the race is fouled by some unscrupulousness of conduct, some injustice, some secret deception by which advantage may be gained. Another danger is that in the soul-absorption in competition the things that really matter are forgotten or ignored. That was Jacob's case. The process had been gradual, but the issue was inevitable. After twenty years with Laban, Jacob awoke to the fact that from being whole-heartedly religious, he had become whole-heartedly worldly. Bethel and

its vision and its vow had vanished from his mind, and the reason of it was the race for wealth, the absorbing rivalry in which he lived. Conscience awoke and spoke like a trumpet. "You must get out of it all. For your own sake you must clear out of it." As clearly as if the voice had spoken from the sky—and in very truth it was from the sky, for conscience is the voice of God—the message rang in his ears. "Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there; and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother." Back to Bethel! Happy are they that hear and obey.

The best way of making progress in the Christian life, said one of the saints of the Church, is to begin it all over again. One of the memorable personalities and preachers of the north of Scotland was John Murker of Banff. In his biography we are told how, on a certain day, at the age of fifteen, when herding cattle in the fields, he knelt on the sward, and there committed his life to the keeping of Christ. Like Jacob of old, he took a stone and set it up to mark the place. Thirty years after, when he was a minister of the Gospel, he went back to the spot and found to his disappointment that the stone of memorial had been removed, but as near to the spot as he knew, he knelt again on the

green grass and renewed his consecration, thanking God for the Rock of Ages that nothing could move.

Now some believers have no day or date for conversion. Men like Robert Murray M'Cheyne, John Struthers of Greenock, and many others had no definite, dated day of conversion.

Of one famous Home Mission minister, whose study in the great Revival days was crowded with anxious inquirers, like the consulting-room of a great physician, it is related that being present on one occasion at a gathering where many people told what the Lord had done for their souls, the audience looked forward with much eagerness to his testimony. "Friends," he said, "I shall disappoint you, I know. The truth is that I have never been converted." The words fell like a bomb-shell on the meeting. "But," he added, "I do not remember the time when I did not love and pray to the Lord Jesus Christ."

John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb.

Some of you Christian people have no day of which you can say, then and there, by such and such a preacher, or by such and such a text, I was led to Jesus Christ. But you are committed Christians. You follow Christ earnestly, prayerfully, as best as you know

how. The question, as one famous preacher put it who crossed the Minch in perfect calm—a state of that troubled sea that is almost unknown—the question is not the date or the manner of your crossing, but *are you there?* You know you are there, believing in and obeying Jesus Christ. But, however or whenever that life began, I feel certain that, in the course of it, there have been some shining hours when God was consciously very near to you, and you were wrapped in the peace of His presence as a child in the arms of its father. Your conscience was then peculiarly sensitive to sin. You recoiled from it; you were shocked at the thought of it; you dropped it as you drop a hot coal from your hand. Your mind was illumined. Your will was fortified, your love was true and tender toward Jesus Christ. That was your Bethel, your house of God, and God's message to you as to Jacob is "Back to Bethel, and dwell there". Ay, there's the rub! *how* to dwell there.

Some things will help you as they helped Jacob, and nothing more than the building of an altar. What of the altar of public worship? Are you as regular in your attendance at public worship as you might be? No one can say that a Sabbath spent in the country with no public service is in itself wrong. For the hungry soul crumbs of the

Bread of Heaven may be found there, but can any one say that the food is so abundant, so spiritual, so satisfying in the temple of nature as at the Table spread in the House of God?

What of the home altar? Many young married people begin life so well, kneeling together once a day at least at the throne of grace; but children come, cares and duties accumulate. There is haste and hurry, and the fire on the home altar, untended, goes out. Men and women, if there be one thing more than another that many of us bless God for it is this, that once a day by a faithful father we were gathered about the altar of home, and life was bathed, cleansed, braced by the atmosphere of prayer.

What of the altar of your own chamber? Speaking many years ago to students, Henry Drummond said, "Young man, ten minutes with God in the morning, *two* minutes if it be heart to heart and face to face, will alter the complexion of the whole day". The secret of victory over temptation is to meet it before it comes, to anticipate it, to visualize the place and time where you will be tempted, to grapple with it there and then, to fight to the finish on your knees, and then, when it does come, victory will be a walk-over.

This day, more particularly, our message is to men and women who have had a Bethel,

but from whose minds and memories in the stress and strain of life, or it may be in absorption in pleasure, the impression has faded and passed, and the message is "Back to Bethel!" Some, indeed, may have no Bethel to go back to. Here and now, if your heart is toward it, that Bethel may be found.

In a church in this city some years ago, two girls with eager faces sat down beside a lady, who noted their look, and interpreted it aright. "You seek Jesus Christ?" she said. Both answered, "Yes!" "Well," she replied, "He seeks you more than you seek Him." Her word was like an "apple of gold in a basket of silver". The arrow of love found its mark. Their eyes opened in wonder, but they believed and accepted, and they went home that day with a new peace in their heart and a new song in their mouth.

CHAPTER XIV

WINGS AND HANDS

"Under their wings, on the four sides of them, were human hands."—EZEK. i. 8 (Moffatt).

To read the Book of Ezekiel, in the quaint, memorable figure of Matthew Henry, is to read a book so deep that an elephant may swim in it, and so simple and safe that a lamb may wade in it. It is the oracle of a mind of the finest calibre inspired to its loftiest use.

The first chapter opens with a vision of judgment, a whirlwind sweeping down irresistibly from the north, a fire of dazzling brightness infolding itself—the potentiality of destructive power that, if let loose, would reduce the world to ashes, but is self-restrained, folding inwards upon itself. The chapter closes with a theophany—the omnipotence of Godhead of which the prophet speaks with bated breath. What difference it makes to know on the authority of God's Son that Omnipotence is guided and governed in its exercise only by love! Between these poles stands the vision of the creatures by whom the Almighty is served, the portrait

of which is unique in the pages of literature, each detail of which is symbolic and filled with far-reaching significance.

These creatures have four faces. The first is the face of a man—the sympathy, the brotherhood, the service of humanity; the second is the face of a lion—a strength and courage more than human; the third is the face of an ox—the symbol of patient, uncomplaining, unwearying service—a service that may be crowned with sacrifice, for the latter end of an ox was very often the altar of offering. The fourth is the face of an eagle—strong, swift, soaring to the sky.

In these four faces, interpreters have found the symbols of the four Gospels, representing four aspects of the Person and Work of our Lord. Matthew opens with the Birth in Bethlehem, tells us much about His home life, His mother, sisters and brethren, presents to us the portrait of perfect humanity. Mark stresses more particularly the courage with which He faced all odds, setting His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem—the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. Luke, the beloved Physician, follows and finds in the Great Physician the ideal of his own life—helping, healing, redeeming; it is in Luke alone that the three pre-eminent parables of grace are found—the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son—service crowned with sacrifice. John

is symbolized in the eagle, soaring very high, beginning with the Godhead from which He came, closing with the Godhead to which He returned.

Humanity, heroism, service, sacrifice, and these lifted to the plane of Divinity—the incomparable ideal, realized only in Jesus Christ! Is He not worthy of our faith, our love, our adoring worship?

Now the Spirit under whose guidance every detail of this picture was visualized is the Spirit by whose guidance alone the vision can be interpreted. Relying upon that guidance, we put the question to ourselves—What was the concept of the prophet's mind when he wrote these words, "Under their wings, on the four sides of them, were human hands"?

The truth of these symbols may be crystallized in an illustration. Many years ago, the late Sir Bartle Frere was about to visit a friend in Scotland. For some reason or other his prospective host was unable to meet him at the railway station. This office was entrusted to another, who gladly and proudly accepted it. "But," he said, "I have not met Sir Bartle, I have not seen him. How shall I know which is he?" After a moment's thought the host said, "If you see a tall gentleman helping somebody, that is Sir Bartle Frere." Height and helpfulness—wings and hands! Physical height in his

case, but moral height also, and helpfulness; for it was Sir Bartle Frere, as David Livingstone tells us in the opening pages of his *Last Journals*, who, by a letter to the Sultan of Zanzibar, did more than any other to help him in the last lap of his marvellous life. Height and helpfulness and swiftness, wings and human hands—the three qualities by which perfect service is characterized.

Now these three must go together: one of these, two of these, are not enough. Service fails, fails in its ideal, and in its issues, if it lacks the third.

Some of God's servants have wings, they have ideals; they can soar, and they are not lacking in swiftness. From one continent they sweep to another, from Europe to Asia, from Asia to America, preaching, teaching, lecturing, attracting great audiences, holding them, thrilling them with the magic of oratory; yet themselves unpractical, lacking hands, lacking the power of service by which ideals may be realized. Some workers have hands, good hands, great powers of service, but they have no wings, no ideals by which service may be lifted, directed, inspired to noble ends. Some have height and helpfulness, but they have no speed. Opportunity passes, and nothing is done.

1. So, in the first place, service must have height; service must be rendered wisely,

tactfully, sympathetically. How often service is void of all value by the tactless way in which it is done! Service must have the right spirit, the right motive. Service must have a power and a patience more than human, by which it may be sustained. All which things come from above. To serve well one must know how to soar; in other words, how to believe and how to pray. Is that always and sufficiently realized?

There is, indeed, no period in history, in which the spirit of service has taken so firm a hold on the mind and imagination in this and other countries, as the present—a spirit that finds expression in the mottoes and vows of many organizations. To do a good turn to one person, at least, every day—that is the ideal, and the ideal is excellent; it could hardly be better. But it is only procedure, and procedure alone, if done without the right spirit; how futile, how fruitless that may be! To give a cup of cold water to a thirsty person, to toss a coin from a window to a beggar singing on the street—that is one thing; but to give a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, *i.e.* in the spirit of the Master—that is quite another.

"Not what we give, but what we share,
For the gift without the giver is bare:
Who gives himself, with his alms feeds three—
Himself, his hungering neighbour and Me."

In other words, the value of service depends on personality; and personality depends on spirit and character.

If, for example, going straight to the heart of this truth, the question were put: What is the supreme service that our Lord rendered to the world? Was it His atoning death on Calvary? Did Jesus do anything equal to dying for the sins of the world? With complete conviction we would say that He did. The crowning service of Jesus Christ to the world was His sinless life, His radiant, victorious, divinely inspired and inspiring personality — *a service without which every other would have been vain.*

So also with us. The supreme service you or I can render is not what we do, it is what we are. "Young man," said Tolstoy, to an eager reformer, "you have sweat much blood for the world; sweat some for yourself first. If you wish to make the world better, you must *be* the best you can. You cannot bring the kingdom of God into the world unless it be in your own heart first."

Service must have wings; it must have height. It must flow from the heights; it must be directed toward them. It is fruitless unless it be itself the fruit of faith, of love, of prayer.

2. Service must be helpfulness. Under their wings were human hands. The position

is symbolic, significant. The hands were not obtrusive; they were not officious; they were not self-advertising; they were hidden under the wings. The right hand did not know what the left hand was doing.

Humble hands, but human; and what magic of helpfulness lies in a human hand! Which of us, the oldest as well as the youngest, does not know and remember a mother's hand. What skill was there, the skill of experience and devotion. What willingness was there, early and late, day and night at our service. What speed was there, not a moment lost when the cry of need was heard; what cooling, soothing, comforting power when it was laid on a hot, fevered brow; what power of restraint when laid gently on our arm, "My boy, my girl, you cannot do that, you could not go there". The Hebrews had a proverb, "Because God could not be everywhere, He made mothers"—mistaken in its theology, accurate in the truth and feeling it expresses, for there is a period in every child's life when its mother stands to it in the place of God. How is it that a mother's love and care are so like God's? The reason is that they are so high; mother-love is so pure, so selfless, so divine.

Real height always means real helpfulness. Divine height means divine helpfulness.

"Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God," with that divine consciousness, clear and full, laid aside his garments and girt himself with a towel, and took a basin and poured water into it and washed the disciples' feet. How incompatible it seems! But it is God's law of service. The higher a soul is, the humbler it is. He that is greatest, the biggest man among you, will be the servant of you all.

3. Service must have speed; it must be swift.

The King's business requireth haste. Christ's business is your life and mine; Christ's call, Christ's cross, Christ's work must have precedence over every other duty. For the sake of others, service must be swift. Opportunity has wings, whether service has them or not. Opportunity spreads its wings and flies away, while service creeps slowly behind. A like opportunity may indeed come again, similar in many ways; but in its potentiality of meeting an urgent need, the same opportunity will never come again, never! For our own sake service must be swift. The punctual discharge of every duty is one of the noblest traits of character.

The desks of some men are in constant confusion, letters unanswered, papers lying everywhere, things needed discoverable no-

where—chaos and disorder, the symbol of their own untidy, procrastinating souls. Once every day the desk of other men is cleared, every letter answered, the portion of daily toil accomplished—the symbol of an orderly soul. Our desk, our counter, our work is our life. For our own sakes, for the sake of others, for Christ's sake let us keep it up to time.

Work while it is called to-day; do it now; *do it now*, for the night cometh when no man can work.

CHAPTER XV

THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF PERFECTION

"I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. And Abraham said, 'O that Ishmael might live before thee!'"—GEN. xvii. 1, 18.

"BE thou perfect." The counsel, the command of perfection! Was that counsel possible for Abraham? Is it possible for us? Is it not the Everest of life that we gaze upon from a far distance and admire and yearn after, but which in this life we cherish no hope of attaining? Some of us have lived more than half a century; some, it may be, more than the allotted span, and the record of that life is known to us, and it is known to God—a record at best of a few temporary, qualified triumphs, but studded thick with humiliating, shameful defeat. With a being like ours—a being that was indeed created by God, and stamped with His divine image, but a being that is so perverted, that the Psalmist spoke not only for himself, but for all mankind when he said, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me"; with a nature like ours, in which the passions and appetites of the body,

the evil thoughts and evil desires of the heart spring up spontaneously and inevitably as polluted water from a polluted spring, and that, too, in spite of our most earnest endeavours and prayers, is it conceivable that life for such beings as we are can ever be perfect?

To answer that question, perfection must first be defined. When God said to Abram, "Be thou perfect," did He mean that Abram should be sinless? If perfection in human life means the same thing as the perfection of Christ, a life in which negatively there was no sin, and in which positively every virtue and grace was found in its perfect degree and perfect proportion, then, truly, perfection is not possible. There is none that sinneth not, no, not one.

The only way in which the Scripture meaning of perfection can be found is a careful study of the passages in which it occurs. You open your Concordance at the word "perfect," and you find that in the Old Testament ten Hebrew words of different shades of meaning are rendered by the one word "perfect." None of these words means sinlessness. When, *e.g.*, we read of Job, that he was a "perfect" man, and eschewed evil; when Hezekiah says, "I will walk before the Lord with a perfect heart," the meaning is not sinlessness—the last claim that any

saint, Old Testament or New, would make for himself. The meaning is single-mindedness, whole-heartedness in consecration and obedience to the will of God.

In the New Testament, four Greek words are rendered "perfect", and of these four, one only can bear the interpretation of sinlessness, a word that occurs in the third chapter of Philippians, a passage in which that kind of perfection is definitely disclaimed.

For New Testament teaching, that passage is indeed classic. Let us study it; let us concentrate upon it. Anticipating the results of that study we may say, there is a kind of perfection that the Apostle deliberately disclaims for himself, and would have predicated of none but his Lord; but there is also a kind of perfection that he claims for himself and for other believers.

Both kinds of perfection are found in that passage. "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect." The Greek word is a verb, a past participle; the meaning is, a completed process, "not as though I were already perfected," the only word in the New Testament that connotes sinlessness; a perfection that can be predicated only of God and of the redeemed in heaven; a perfection, that, as we have

already seen, the Apostle definitely and decisively disclaims, "Not as though I were already perfect, but forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

But you read on; you find a perfection that the Apostle claims for himself and for other believers. "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded." The Greek word here is an adjective. Its meaning is complete, entire, whole. Applied to life, the meaning is full-grown, adult, mature.

Like every other form of life, soul-life has its stages of being and of development—its beginning, its growth, its state of maturity. It begins with a new birth, an event that may be definite, dated in place and time; but may be wholly unconscious, for many of God's saints are unable to say when their true life began. For many believers, however, there has been a soul experience so real, so radical, so revolutionary, that the values of life were reversed, and the path of thought and desire and conduct so revolutionized, that they look back upon it as the place and the hour when they passed from death into life.

Soul-life has its period of growth, its in-

fancy, childhood and youth. Knowledge is imperfect; strength and character are not stabilized. Life is guided and governed more by impulse and emotion than by principle. True life indeed can never cease to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ Jesus. But there is a stage in that growth in which, as compared with previous states, it may be looked upon as mature, a Christian manhood or womanhood, never sinless, but full-grown, mature. That is New Testament perfection, but how seldom is it found! How very immature, ill-balanced, disproportioned, partially Christianized most lives are, strong in one virtue or grace, but weak, totally lacking in another!

"He has the defect of his good qualities," we say, and the words are often used fatalistically, as if it were inevitable that strength in one direction had to be accompanied and counterbalanced by weakness in another. To speak thus, to think thus, is sheer scepticism; it is the pessimism of faithlessness. For such weakness there is no necessity. Moral weakness in any direction is always sin, because it is without excuse; but weakness in one direction so often accompanies strength in another, that people generalize experience and look upon it as the law of life.

One life is strong in duty, regular, punctual,

unremitting, unwearying, but it is weak in charity; it is lacking in sympathy; there is little or no pity for the weak and those out of the way.

One life is strong in charity, tender, sympathetic, pitiful, but in habit it is untidy; in work it is fitful, unpunctual, unreliable; it is weak in daily duty.

One life is strong in duty, but it is weak in devotion; public worship and private prayer have little or no place in that life.

One life is strong in devotion; twice every Sunday, once at least on weekdays, public worship is engaged in, but that life may be weak in duty, in charity.

How incomplete, unsymmetrical, disproportionate life is! Human life is God's temple, and that temple must be symmetrical. The nave of duty must not be too long or too short; the transepts of charity must not be too deep or too shallow; the chancel, the communion table, the place of worship must not be too large (little fear of that in our age), but it must not be too small.

In duty and charity and devotion, life may be right, but in temper and disposition it may be petulant, passionate, and that, too, in its own home. How many are the stumbling-blocks that we professing Christian people put in the path of others! How

much more impressive and persuasive and convincing our witness would be, if only our life were more perfect, more mature !

To reach that maturity we must have an ideal. The only ideal of life is the example of the Lord Jesus Christ. To visualize that ideal seems easy. The life of Jesus is portrayed in four brief biographies in which the face and features of our Lord seem much the same. To make an amalgam of these portraits seems simple, but how difficult it has proved, and how different the resultant portraits have been !

In one age, the early Gnostic age, Jesus was divine only. Christ did not die. His body was assumed for earthly purposes, but Christ had left it before it suffered and died. In another age, and to other believers, Jesus was human only.

The portrait of one age, one preacher, is a Judge, pitiless, relentless, casting sinners into perdition without compunction ; the portrait of another age is the gentle Saviour, the great Physician, the Friend of publicans and sinners. To one believer Jesus is ascetic, puritanic, the sad, suffering bearer of the Cross ; to another He is the boon companion, the companion with whom one would like to go on holiday or play a game. Action and reaction are equal and opposite. The farther the pendulum swings in one direction, the

farther it swings in the opposite. The problem lies just here, that the life of Jesus is so many-sided, the perfect balance of all that is sinlessly good.

For our finite vision, the forming of a perfect portrait of Christ is not possible. It is better, maybe, not to attempt it. The ideal of the Christian life is a principle rather than a portrait. The motto and the motive of the life of Jesus are summed up in one clause, "I came to do the will of him that sent me." God's will is different for each life, but God's will is man's ideal, and that will is known. For the work of life in every aspect, God's will is this: "Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord." For character it is this: "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

For home life it is this: "Be pitiful, be courteous." "He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." For Church life it is this: "Not having spot or wrinkle, holy and without blemish," loyal, liberal, and devout. God's will is man's ideal; the best, for which there must be no second best.

When, later in this chapter, Abraham is offered the son of promise, he no longer wants him. Ishmael is now thirteen years of age, a wild lad, but winning, attractive, and he has wound himself about his father's heart, so that now he deprecates the idea of any other son. "O that Ishmael might live before thee!"

How often it is that we are attracted and won by something less than the best! Custom brings contentment, and we want nothing better. Our Ishmaels are second-bests, and we know it, but custom blunts sensibility, and we aspire to nothing better. For all such our text is God's message, "Be thou perfect".

But how? By what power is it done? Our text is the answer. "I am the Almighty God." "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find." What rule of life shall I follow? Walk before Me; live in My presence. To do that means transfiguration.

> "A servant with this clause,
> Makes drudgery divine:
> Who sweeps a room as for Thy laws,
> Makes that and the action fine."

To do that, and to go on doing it day after day, never to weary in well-doing, to keep the white peak of God's ideal

always before us, and to climb nearer and still nearer it day by day, means a great faith, a great hope, a great courage; but "all things are possible to him that believeth".

CHAPTER XVI

FOUR TIMES WHEN JESUS GAVE THANKS

"At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth."—MATT. xi. 25.

ONE of the four occasions in the New Testament when we read that Jesus gave thanks—an example for worship and for life. In the worship of God, next only to goodness itself, nothing is more acceptable, more welcome than a glad, grateful spirit. The Lord loveth a cheerful giver, and of those acts of giving in which we take part, what can be greater than the giving of oneself, body, soul, and spirit, in an act of worship, in prayer, in consecration, and in praise? God loves cheerfulness in that, as in all other things.

Worship must, of course, be reverent, and the note of reverence is quiet, solemn, subdued. Hilarity in worship, public or private, and, still more, frivolity jar on the spirit of every true worshipper and mar the offering. The most solemn act in which a human being can engage is the worship of God; but it is more than a pity, it is hardly less than a tragedy, that the solemnity of worship should be mistaken for sadness, for a state of con-

straint and depression of the vital energies from which one is glad only to escape. That worship in every part of it should be equally gladsome is not, of course, possible. Confession of sin is a part of every act of worship, but confession cannot be cheerful. Sympathy with sorrow and with suffering, intercession for sufferers, is a part of worship; sympathy cannot be gladsome. Denunciation of sin is a part of public worship; the note of denunciation is not joy, it is indignation.

Worship runs in double harness with life. The cup of worship, like the cup of life, is mingled; there is joy in it, and there is sorrow. But in every act of worship, as in every experience of life, if your faith and mine is the living force in us that means victory over the world, the dominating note of worship will surely be gladness, and of those notes that God waits for and expects to hear, none is more acceptable, more welcome than the note of gratitude and praise.

This morning, it was our privilege to sit at the Table of the Lord; we ate and drank, and in that very act entered into fellowship with Jesus Christ. Now communion is an event; in our Church it is in some cases a half-yearly, in some a quarterly event, but it is more. Communion, when real, is an experience, a daily, continuous, unbroken

experience, an experience which is deepened, intensified at the Table when the door of life is shut hard against the seen and the temporal, and opened wide to Jesus Christ, to things unseen and eternal. That deepened, intensified experience of communion every true communicant seeks to conserve, and so this evening, going back in thought to the Lord's Table, seated there still in spirit if not in body, the prime object of our worship is to continue our communion, and particularly to create and quicken within us the spirit of gratitude and praise.

Now in that worthy endeavour it will help us, I know, to remember that there were four occasions in the life of Jesus when He is reported to have given thanks.

1. Jesus gave thanks for daily bread. He prayed for daily bread. He taught us to pray for it. He gave thanks when He received it. The passage to which I refer specially is Matthew xiv. 19. The place was the sloping hill behind Bethsaida Julias. Five thousand men, beside women and children, were set down in serried rows of fifties and hundreds that the weak and aged, the women and children, might not be trampled or crowded in the rush for the coveted food. Having commanded them to sit down, Jesus took the five loaves and the two fishes, and, looking up to heaven, He

blessed and brake, and gave to His disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.

Of that food our Lord, no doubt, partook. It was a great open-air communion—the first large communion in which our Lord took part, but it was communion in the bread that perisheth. Is not that a part of the communion of every believing Christian life? In a house which I knew well many years ago, and visited often, just over the mantelshelf of the living-room, a needle-and-thread picture, a "sampler", was hung; and the words sewed in colours were these, "Jesus Christ is the Head of this house, the unseen Guest at every meal".

Texts on walls may not appeal to you or me. We are rightly chary of religious ostentation. In the case I think of, ostentation was unthinkable. The motto was the confessed and cherished ideal of two humble, very devout souls. Of the spiritual content of that motto there cannot be two opinions. Communion is an event, but it is more; it is life's experience, an experience which covers life in every part, weekday as well as Sunday, holiday as well as holy day, the most ordinary and secular as well as the most sacred. Now, in keeping that link alive, and in confirming it, it is a good thing to give thanks for our food.

Grace before meals. Is that old-fashioned?

Is the beautiful habit falling into disuse? Is it not worth while reviving, maintaining and making it real? Which of us sitting at the table of another, or indeed at our own table, will take even a bit of bread from another without expressing our thanks?

Such thanks may indeed be formal. Anything, everything, the best that we do, our worship in this house, our communicating at the table, may be formal, unreal, but only if we are unreal. For the real soul, everything in life, our thanks to another, our thanks to God, will be real.

Communion is maintained by contact. To thank God audibly, or it may be silently, when audible grace is not possible, is to create anew and to confirm the link of communion between Him and ourselves as members of His home. Some years ago a minister stayed for a few days in a hotel owned and kept by a widow, a member of the Church of Rome. She was a truly devout woman, and after much conversation and careful thought she made up her mind to become a member of the Protestant Church. One day, in conversation about the Church Catholic and Protestant, she said, "One thing puzzles me about Protestants. They don't thank God for their food. When a Catholic seats himself at table, he crosses himself and gives thanks before and after his meal.

Protestants never do it, or only on the rarest occasion."

Now crossing one's self and giving thanks may be formal. The gratitude of the person who shows it may not be greater than of the person who makes no sign. The same thing, however, might be said of thanks to one another, but would any of us as guests in a house omit the expression of thanks for that reason? Would any host not wonder a little, a great deal, if no thanks were expressed?

My brethren, the argument is really unanswerable, and, being unanswerable, we ought to yield and obey. If it is wrong for us, as we all believe, to fail in the etiquette of gratitude at the table of a friend, is it not right for us, is it not due to the Giver of all good, is it not one of the links of communion, that we should give some expression of our gratitude for the bounties with which our table is spread several times every day?

2. Jesus thanked God that He was no respecter of persons. The passage is Matthew xi. 25, where, after a special revelation of truth to His disciples, Jesus closed His discourse with a brief prayer and said, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it

seemed good in thy sight." Not, indeed, that Jesus was glad that truth should be hid from any one, but for this, namely, that the condition of mind and spirit in which these things could be received, was not the wealth, or the wisdom, or the prudence of this world, but the open, innocent, childlike heart.

Men of great learning, great mental gifts, may indeed possess that spirit; many of them do. Humble, lowly, unlearned people may possess it; many do not. But God is no respecter of persons, of gifts, of talents, mental or material. God's ways with men are equal and just. The man with two talents, who by his diligence doubled them, received the same approval, word for word the same, and the same reward as the man with five talents who made other five—"Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord".

For rich and poor, learned and unlearned, the conditions are the same. The spirit in which alone the gifts of God can be received is the faith of a child.

3. Jesus thanked God that the death of the body was not the end of life. The place was the tomb of Lazarus. The stone had been rolled away, and Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, "Father, I thank thee that

thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me." And when He had thus spoken, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth," and Lazarus came forth bound hand and foot with grave-clothes.

There and then, as never before, it was proved that death was not the end of life—a truth which was confirmed and sealed for evermore when Jesus, by the power of His own endless life, rose from the dead. Jesus gave thanks; His thanks are also ours.

In this house to-day there is not a life of mature years that does not miss and mourn some one whose body lies in the dust; but he is not there; she is not there. They still live more fully, more intensely, more joyfully than ever in this world, and over their grave the words have been uttered by lips that never lied, "I am the Resurrection and the Life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth, and believeth in me shall never die".

4. Jesus gave thanks in the immediate prospect of death (1 Cor. xi. 24). Jesus took bread and gave thanks.

In some communions, the Lord's Supper is known as the Eucharist. The term

is scriptural (*Eucharistesas*, having given thanks). At that Table the faith of Jesus met its ultimate test. To see the Cross in full view, in immediate prospect, to know that in a few hours more the agony of it must be endured, and that deeper agony of soul when, staggering under the burden of the sin of the world, He felt Himself forsaken of God and of man, to give thanks then, and later still, that evening, to join with His disciples in singing the Paschal hymn, "I love the Lord, because he hath heard my prayers and supplications. The pains of hell took hold on me . . . I found grief and trouble. . . . Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints," to sing that at the vestibule of Gethsemane—there surely is the miracle of miracles, the incomparable triumph of faith in God. That miracle, moreover, has been repeated often in the story of the Church.

Polycarp, the aged martyr of Smyrna, eighty-four years of age, whose grave covered with tall, dark yew trees is still shown in Smyrna, sang a hymn while the flames rose about his body to consume it.

When the two Margarets, martyrs of the Covenant, were tied to the stake in the Solway Firth, and the waters rose slowly about them, Margaret Wilson, the younger, just out of her teens, calm, radiant, opened

the New Testament and read, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit"; and then she sang:

"To Thee I lift my soul;
O Lord, I trust in Thee:
My God, let me not be ashamed,
Nor foes triumph o'er me."

The same triumph as that of Jesus Christ, but with a difference. When we read of the triumph of these martyrs we bare our head in reverence. When we read of the triumph of Christ, the wonder, mystery, miracle of it, we bend our knees and worship:

"Strong Son of God, immortal Love,
Whom we, that have not seen Thy face,
By faith, and faith alone, embrace,
Believing where we cannot prove."

Unto Thee do we give thanks. Amen.

CHAPTER XVII

THE MISSIONARY PIONEER

"Because that he wholly followed the Lord God of Israel."—Josh. xiv. 14.

This evening our subject is Caleb, the son of Jephunneh, the bravest man, and, to my mind, one of the noblest lives recorded in the Old Testament, the type and exemplar of pioneer work done for God whether in the old dispensation or in the new.

There are two occasions in particular on which Caleb comes prominently into the picture of Old Testament teaching. One of these is recorded in Numbers xiii., in the first year after the children of Israel had left Egypt and passed into the wilderness. Caleb and Joshua were two of the twelve men sent to spy out the land of Canaan, and they were the only two whose faith and courage were equal to the difficulties and dangers lying ahead, and who stilled the fears of the people, and encouraged them to go forward. The other occasion is recorded in Joshua xiv., forty-five years later, when the people were now in Canaan, and Joshua as judge was portioning out the land, and Caleb,

now eighty-five years of age, made his amazing and very heroic request.

1. We take the second of these first: To visualize that scene is to feel one's soul thrilled with a great admiration. The place was Gilgal, a "heap of stones", a "cromlech", lying between Jericho and Jordan, a plain of some five miles in breadth. It was the spot where the Israelites pitched their first camp in Canaan, the spot where the sons of Israel born in the wilderness were circumcised, and the reproach of Egypt was rolled away; it was the camp to which the army returned after its campaigns and captures, and it was there that Joshua in accordance with divine directions portioned out the land among the twelve tribes. Joshua sat on some rude platform, a natural rock it may have been, and the task of apportioning was proceeding apace when an aged man, but still wonderfully hale and hearty, stepped forward and made his request. Joshua knew him well. For forty-five years Joshua and Caleb had been boon companions, soul companions, for it was these two alone of the multitude that left Egypt that entered the Promised Land, and Joshua raised his hands in blessing as Caleb approached. He reminds Joshua of a promise that Moses, his great predecessor, had made forty-five years before, that the city and the hill of Hebron, then known as

Kirjath-arba, the sacred spot where Abraham and Sarah and Isaac and Rebekah lay buried, but now the home of Anak and his sons, a people "very tall and strong", should be apportioned to him.

To make a request like that at forty years of age when life and strength are at its prime, is one thing; to carry it out at eighty-five, when life has long passed its allotted span, and the vital energies of one's being have inevitably weakened, is another, but it is just here that the spirit of this octogenarian thrills us with a great admiration. "As yet," he says in no boastful spirit, but in the spirit of his own unique courage—"as yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me; as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out, and to come in. Now therefore give me this mountain, and if so be that the Lord will be with me"—there shines out his genuine humility—strong as he felt himself to be, success in such a campaign depended wholly on Jehovah—"if so be that the Lord will be with me, then I shall be able to drive them out, as the Lord said."

The spirit of pure heroism! Is it not thrilling to read an incident like that?

In the New Testament, the man whose heroic stature equals, if it does not surpass that of Caleb, is the Apostle Paul. His life

and labours sparkle and glow with great courage, but there is no passage in which that spirit shines with clearer light than in the last chapter of 1st Corinthians where, in sketching out his programme of travel and toil, he says to the Church at Corinth, "I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost, for a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and," he continues, as if this were a special attraction and inducement to stay at Ephesus, "there are many adversaries".

Most people, when they hear of many adversaries, look for a door out. When Paul heard of adversaries, he looked for a door in. Most people, then and now, you and I, if we were perfectly frank, look for an easy billet, a soft job, as we call it, the minimum of work, the maximum of wage. Paul knew perfectly what his wages would be. Writing later of that time in Ephesus he said, "I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus"—not literal lions. Among his many perils, he did not have to enter the arena of the Roman sports, and to do battle with lions, but with men whose opposition was as savage and cruel and deadly as the onslaught of a hungry wild beast. Does it not rebuke us, humble us, shame us, and yet inspire us to read of a life and spirit like that?

Such heroism, moreover, does not end with the Acts of the Apostles. The "Acts of the

Apostles" is not a finished story; it is a serial running through all generations, to be continued in the next. Of recent chapters in that serial, one might name the lives of Robert Moffat, David Livingstone, James Gilmour of Mongolia, Bishop Hannington, and Alexander Mackay of Uganda, John G. Paton of the New Hebrides, Mary Slessor of Calabar, James Chalmers of New Guinea, and thousands more who in dark, dangerous, cannibal lands have lived and laboured and suffered, and turned many to righteousness, and whose names shine as the firmament and as the stars for ever and ever.

Of James Chalmers we read that, having been sent to Raratonga, he laboured there for eleven years, but was never quite contented, for missionaries had been there before him, and he was building on other men's foundations. His sacred ambition was pioneer work, and the Mission Board at home was given no rest till he was sent to the virgin soil, the cannibal soil, of New Guinea, where, after labours abundant, he and his wife sealed their witness with their blood.

Naturally, inevitably, the passing of the years must bring with it the lessening of vital energy. The call of the heroic, we say, is for the young. But what is youth? It is not years; it is spirit. When Longfellow had passed his seventieth year, he said he

never felt old, for he was like a pear tree in his garden, which in old age grew a bit of new wood every year. If only the spirit of youth is maintained, there is no age at which the call to the heroic may not be heard and obeyed.

Your mission and mine may be at home; we may be well up in years, but the romance of life is not past. The best work of many a life has been done after fifty, after sixty, and in some lives after eighty years of age.

2. The other great event in Caleb's life, forty-five years before this, is related in the thirteenth chapter of Numbers.

The journey across the Wilderness from Sinai seemed only a question of months, not of years. The prospect of possession seemed imminent. Twelve men were chosen, one from each tribe, to go and spy out the land. With two exceptions, their report was depressing, terrorizing. The land was indeed fair and fruitful, a land of milk and honey, and proof of it was brought in the colossal bunch of grapes from Eshcol, swinging from a staff resting on the shoulders of two men, but the people were strong, and the cities were walled, and the children of Anak lived there, and the tribes were fierce and warlike—Amalekites, Amorites, Jebusites, Canaanites. The people listened and paled with fear. "Would God," they cried, "we had died in Egypt! Would

God we had died in the Wilderness! Let us make us a captain who will lead us back to Egypt." Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before them. Caleb and Joshua stood on their feet and cried, "The land we have searched is indeed a good land, a land flowing with milk and honey. If the Lord delight in us he will indeed bring us into it and give it to us." Mad with fear and rage, the people cried, "Stone them with stones". Just then God intervened. "Thus far and no further, here shall thy proud waves be stayed." What happened we do not know, but the writer puts it, "The glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation".

Caleb and Joshua saved the situation. Utterly fearless themselves, they had the God-given gift of instilling their courage into others. Great battles have been won by great leaders oftener than by great armies. The presence of the Duke of Wellington, to his army, was the pledge of victory.

In his *Morning Watch*, the late Dr. Struthers of Greenock tells us that on one occasion Frederick the Great sent a message to one of his generals: "I send you against the enemy with sixty thousand men". When the troops were counted, they numbered only fifty thousand. The general wrote a letter of protest and complaint. There must be a

mistake. "No," replied Frederick, "there is no mistake; I counted *you* for ten thousand men."

In our own humble degree the task of inspiring, heartening others to noble deeds falls to each of us, and no higher work can be done, but in a special degree it falls to the lot of women, and especially to mothers. What is the ideal of life that mothers cherish for their sons? Their ideal is education, but to what end? Most mothers, wrote John Ruskin, ask for an education that will enable their sons to ring with confidence the visitors' bell at a double-belled door, an education that will issue in a double-belled door of their own. This, he says, is all they ask for, and they ask for it on bended knees. Some mothers certainly, but not all! There are two gospels for life, and many mothers know it, and they have chosen the better. There is the gospel of "getting on" in this world, and there is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the doing of God's will in any sphere, however humble, the bearing of one's cross, however heavy, in service and suffering for the saving of the world. Which of these is the higher? Is there anything in this world comparable with the surrender of self, of the world, of everything in the service of mankind? Now, in the forming and fashioning of life's ideals, the buckling on of men's armour, women,

mothers, wives, sisters play a great part. It is women that make men heroes or cowards.

If there was one braver missionary than James Chalmers, it was his wife. On one occasion, when a plot against their life had been discovered, and a vessel lay out in the offing for which they had only to signal to make good their escape, the question was put: Shall we all go? Shall we all stay? Will the women go and the men stay? It was Mrs. Chalmers that answered, "We are here in the service of the Master—if we live, we live; if we die, we die". They stayed, the peril passed; they were providentially saved. What higher ambition can any wife or mother cherish than daring service for Christ in the dark, dangerous fields of the world?

The secret of Caleb's life lies in these words, "He wholly followed the Lord God of Israel". The figure is nautical. With every sail set he followed the Lord God. That must have meant some great experience. At some point in his boyhood or early manhood, Caleb touched reality in Jehovah, just as you and I may touch it more easily by far in Jesus Christ. At that touch he held up both hands. He made absolute, unconditional surrender. That surrender meant life, a gift of life so complete, so continuous, that for the rest of his days he followed wholly, wholeheartedly, the Lord his God.

One of *the* books of recent years is *The Christ of the Indian Road*, written by S. Stanley Jones. It is a book immensely worth reading. After eight years of strenuous work he broke down, collapsed several times in the act of addressing meetings, felt that he was at the end of his tether. All the time, with indomitable spirit, he was planning a new campaign on a greater scale, but, in his own words, "I saw that unless I got help from somewhere I would have to give up my missionary career. It was one of my darkest hours. At that time I was in a meeting at Lucknow. While in prayer, not particularly thinking about myself, a Voice seemed to say, 'Are you yourself ready for this work to which I have called you?' I replied, 'No, Lord, I am done for, I have reached the end of my rope'. The Voice replied, 'If you will turn that over to me and not worry about it, I will take care of it'. I quickly answered, 'Lord, I close the bargain right here'. A great peace settled into my heart and pervaded me. I knew it was done. Life—abundant Life—had taken possession of me. I was so lifted up that I scarcely touched the road as I quietly walked home that night. Every inch was holy ground. . . . I seemed possessed by Life and Peace and Rest—by Christ Himself. . . .

"Nine of the most strenuous years of my

life have gone by since then, and the old trouble has never returned, and I have never had such health. But it was more than a physical Touch. I seemed to have tapped new Life for body, mind, and spirit. Life was on a permanently higher level. And I have done nothing but take it. . . . Christ to me had become *Life*. Apart from this Touch I question if I would have had the courage to answer the call to work among these leaders of India's thought and life. It was too big and too exacting. But here I saw my Resources, and they have not failed."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SACRIFICE IN THE GIFT

1 Cor. xvi. 1, 2.

In every Church, whether it is so named or not, the Fund for the maintenance of its ministry is its Central Fund. Of these material props on which the fabric of a Church rests, it is the central pillar. The only way in which a Church can prosper and progress, the only way in which it can exist, is by a steady, loyal, liberal maintenance of that Fund.

That Fund, however, it need hardly be said, is not the only one. Second only in importance is the Fund for Foreign Missions, for Home Missions, for the Colleges and for the many Schemes of the Church. "Too many," we are often tempted to say or to feel, and no one feels it more than the minister on whom the task of appealing largely falls. But that feeling is groundless. Every penny contributed is imperatively needed, and far more. But how well it would be if the funds of the Church were unified, and the appeals of the pulpit were reduced to one or at least to a minimum, and one large inclusive gift

covered everything, and that gift were divided in proportion to different needs.

At the present moment, indeed, Churches are thinking and planning towards such a unification. In the spirit of that movement, I would speak of Christian Giving in its widest sense, and there is no passage I can think of in which the principles of that Giving are more clearly or more authoritatively enunciated than in the opening verses of the sixteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians.

Now concerning the collection, as I gave orders to the Churches of Galatia, so also do ye. "On the first day of the week"—Christian Giving should be methodical, regular, systematic—"let every one of you lay by him in store"—Christian Giving should be singular, individual, personal—"according as God hath prospered him"—Christian Giving should be proportionate to the ability to give.

The motive of Christian Giving is gratitude and love, gratitude for *so* great salvation; the method of it to which our thoughts are specially directed this evening should be methodical, individual, and proportionate.

1. Giving should be systematic: "On the first day of the week". In daily life, disbursements of money fall under two heads: (1) the payment of debts to a fellow-creature

—an obligation, that is enforced by law, which one can evade only at the risk of prosecution ; (2) the payment of our debt of gratitude to Christ in the furthering of His work—an obligation that can be enforced by no external authority but by our sense of duty and our own free will.

To say that one of these duties is more imperative than the other, would be an error. To the Disciple of Christ, duty is daylight, and every duty is equally obligatory ; but how often it is that the same person who meets every known, earthly obligation with a meticulous promptitude, and prides himself that he is in debt to nobody, is casual, spasmodic, unmethodical in meeting his obligations to Jesus Christ and His Church—not always that He does not feel or acknowledge these, but very often because the habit of regular giving has not been formed.

Now, in the creating and confirming of that habit, nothing is more helpful than a fixed day or date on which the offering is given. On the first day of the week—the Resurrection Day—our weekly Easter—what day more appropriate for offerings on the altar of Christ! Not indeed a fixed, binding rule. Christian Ethics does not consist of a body of rules, but of a body of unchanging principles. To say that Giving can be Christian only if the offering is made on the first

day of the week would be a travesty of the liberty with which Christ makes His people free. The note of truly Christian Giving is spontaneity, voluntariness; but that note may be misapprehended, misapplied.

In the middle of last century the Bishop of Dublin, the youngest Bishop of his Church, but frail in health, preached a sermon, and made an appeal for an orphanage. In the middle of his discourse, he put his handkerchief to his mouth and took it away red. It was the beginning of the end, and he knew it. Spreading forth his hands he cried, "Alas, my poor orphans!" The service ended there, and soon after also his service on earth. The offering that day was a record. Purses with their contents were laid on the plate. Rings were slipped from bediamonded fingers. Bangles, brooches, watches, everything was put on the plate. Large cheques followed in a few hours, and the dying Bishop had the joy of knowing that his orphanage was free from care for many a year.

A voluntary collection! we say; but a little thought will show us that the term is not applicable. Voluntary giving is too often thought of as the result of the mood or emotion of the moment. So far, indeed, as that collection was concerned, it was involuntary rather than voluntary. It was the result of a storm of emotion by which that

congregation was swept like leaves before an autumn breeze. Voluntaryism is one of the great words of our language; it is an act of the whole personality. It is that calm, considered, conscientious resolve of the whole man by which something is set apart for Christ, and it is that exercise of will by which that resolve is carried into deed.

In some callings, indeed, income varies from year to year, but, within a certain margin, most people know what their resources for the year will be, and every careful, conscientious person resolves to live within them. The difference between spending £2 15s. and £3 5s. per week when the income is £3, is the difference between solvency with a margin and insolvency with its many miseries. It is the difference between a light heart and one loaded with care. Speaking to young married people, the late Dr. Parker said, "Take a house so rented that you could pay the double of it, and you will have a margin for Rest, Recreation, Charity, Christ."

In that calculation, in every Christian life, a certain proportion—it may have to be small—will be set aside for the work of Christ and His Church. In the forming of that habit of giving, nothing helps more than a definite date for the offering. On the first day of the week, on the first Sunday of the month, on the first Sunday of the year—no

rule, only a great principle — giving to Christ should be as regular, as methodical as the payment of rent or taxes, the discharge of any earthly obligation. How else can a Church carry on?

Happy indeed is the congregation that is in such a state. Blessed are those members that do it. It is the condition of the blessing of one of the richest promises of God. "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

2. Christian Giving must be personal, individual.

"On the first day of the week let *every one* of you lay by him in store." How often it is that the "willing horse" gets more than he is able to carry! How often it is that the financing of a congregation is left wrongfully, disproportionately to the few! How easy and simple and successful the task of office-bearers and treasurers would be if every one took his proportionate share!

"Bear ye one another's burdens," *i.e.* the extra weights by which some lives are oppressed and crushed, "and so fulfil the law of Christ." Yes, but three verses later the same Apostle says, "Every man shall bear his own burden," and the word there means

the freight a ship is built to carry. It is the kit of each soldier in the army. Do we all carry our own kit, or do we lay it on shoulders already loaded ?

Giving, of course, means ability to give. There are homes where young members are still at school or college or apprenticeship, and they have no income, or none equal to personal necessities, and the only giver is the bread-winner of the home. But there are homes where young people are in work and earn good wages, and for lack of thought, lack of a formed habit, the only giver continues to be the father. "Young men and women," I once heard a well-known preacher say, "do not sit on your father's coat tails." Homely advice, but sound. The meaning of it is this. "Be independent, cultivate the spirit of independence in everything, in Church life and work as well. Do your bit ; carry your own kit."

The congregation in which that counsel is not needed has yet to be formed. You do well, many of you I know, but "the room for improvement is the biggest room in the world", and you would do better, far better, if each one bore his personal, individual share.

3. Christian Giving must be proportionate to ability—"according as God hath prospered you".

Now that principle cuts both ways. It

may mean decrease in your gifts ; it may mean increase. In the Providence of God, it may be, you are not so well off as in former years. Income is less, obligations have increased. That may be no fault of yours. The tides of prosperity and adversity are such that the strongest, wisest, most diligent, most honourable cannot command them. Having written some years ago to a strong, steady, capable man who was caught in an ebbing undercurrent and carried out to sea, and to his great sorrow had to make a compromise, I received a reply, one of the noblest ever penned, which ended with these words :

> "Though from the fold, with sad surprise,
> My flocks cut off I see,
> Though famine pine in empty stalls,
> Where herds were wont to be;
>
> Yet in the Lord will I be glad,
> And glory in His love,
> In Him I'll joy who will the God
> Of my salvation prove."

How rich is he who in the depths of his poverty holds firm his faith in God ! Income decreases, obligations increase ; giving must be less. Income increases, giving should be more. Young people begin with a modest offering. It may be sufficient ; it may, indeed, be generous, but income doubles, trebles, multiplies, and the offering too often continues the same.

What proportion should one give? Once again, on New Testament principles, there is no rule. A tenth, a twentieth for one man in his circumstances may be more than a fifth or a third from another in his. You are Christ's free men and free women. It is for you and for you alone to decide.

To speak of Christian Giving from the pulpit is to degrade it, so some aver, but Christ did not think so. "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Paul did not think so. The way in which the apostle links Christian Giving with the central truths of our faith is deeply significant. The subject of the chapter previous to this was the Resurrection of the body, a great argument culminating in the words, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" and then with no pause, for there are no chapters and verses in the original Greek, with no sense of hiatus, or incongruity, or descent to a lower plane, he adds, "Now concerning the collection——".

The act of Giving is associated with the central doctrine of the Resurrection.

In the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, the eighth chapter, the subject is Christian Giving, and there it is spoken of in the same breath with the Incarnation and the Cross. "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your

sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." What higher level could Giving be placed upon?

The crisis in Foreign Missions in every Church is so acute that unless help is given missions must be abandoned and missionaries discharged.

You have your own problems, I know, heavy enough; but these things you will consider as in the presence of Christ, and you will give methodically, individually, proportionately, and above all *cheerfully*, for "the Lord loveth a cheerful giver".

CHAPTER XIX

ROOT AND FRUIT

"Acquaint now thyself with God, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee."—JOB xxii. 21.

THE best bit of advice that one man can give to another, the counsel that Eliphaz gave to Job!

What, then, was the concept of good in the mind of Eliphaz, when he said to Job, "Good shall come unto thee"? If this word "good" had been rendered in the plural instead of the singular—the "good things" of this present world, that state of health and wealth and comfort and happiness that every one covets, the concept of good in the mind of Eliphaz would have been accurately rendered.

That Eliphaz is not misrepresented by this interpretation is evident from the 23rd verse: "If thou return to the Almighty, thou shalt be built up . . . and thou shalt lay up gold as dust, and the gold of Ophir as the stones of the brooks. Yea, the Almighty shall be thy defence, and thou shalt have plenty of silver". Prosperity in this present world—the proof of godliness

and the reward of it—so at least Eliphaz and his fellow-comforters believed.

Nowadays, a Job's comforter is a proverbial sarcasm. Job is the type, the ideal of patience. To be preached at, as Job was, with long argumentative indictments, to listen patiently to these impeachments, while suffering agonies of body and mind, never to lose one's temper, to reply to each fresh assault upon one's integrity with calm and dignity, is surely the acme of human patience.

That Job's comforters meant to be kind as well as faithful, there is no doubt. Motives may be unimpeachable when belief and argument are wholly mistaken. Their doctrine of Providence, their belief, namely, that godliness of living was followed always and inevitably by worldly success, and still more the converse of that doctrine, that special suffering was the consequence and the proof of special sin—that doctrine was radically wrong.

Job was a great sufferer; he must, therefore, have been a great sinner. If Job would only own that, and confess it, if he would bow before the Almighty and say, "Thy hand has been heavy upon me, but thy judgment has been lighter than my guilt", the penalty would pass, the burden of suffering would be removed.

But in the only sense in which sin was then understood, namely, the breach of God's laws, the neglect of known duty, the sin of act or habit, Job was one of the least guilty of mankind. He was a "perfect man and one that eschewed evil". He was as devout, moreover, as he was innocent. The altar fires of home life were kept burning. Family worship, private prayer, were regular and real. The book opens with the narrative of a family festal gathering. Festal gatherings of all kinds, the most innocent, the most laudable, are potential of evil. On the morning after the feast, Job rose early and offered sacrifices and prayed, "For it may be," he said, "that one of my sons has sinned". Such worship was no exception in his perfectly ordered life: "Thus did Job continually".

"Thrice armed is he that hath his quarrel just." Job's comforters were Job's accusers; but, conscious of his integrity, comforted and fortified by that consciousness, he meets them unflinching. In a series of closely reasoned discourses, rising often into noble poetic diction, Job meets his accusers and maintains his integrity.

He does more; Job is very daring. If the words may be allowed, he stands up to God. "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." So the words are rendered (xiii. 15);

and it is only with reluctance and regret that one rejects a form of words precious to many as the expression of triumphant faith, but scholars are agreed that the rendering is wrong. The original reading is not certain, but the best opinion is in favour of the Revised Version, "Though he slay me, yet will I wait for him", and the meaning of it is this: God is omnipotent, He can do what He wills. He may slay me; but if that blow falls on me, I will wait for it, I will take it standing. Daring, truly, beyond measure; but admirable, morally magnificent.

Whole-heartedly Job believed in God; but he believed also in his own integrity. God might destroy him if He willed, but there was one thing that God Himself could not destroy, one thing that he prized more than life itself, and that was a conscience free from guilt. That this interpretation is accurate is evident from the words that follow: "But will I maintain mine own ways before Him".

Now the key to this situation, as we have already noted, lies in the doctrine of Providence that was held by every Jew of that age, and of every age up to the time of Christ, the doctrine, namely, that life was prosperous, peaceful, painless in proportion as it was truly godly; that special suffering was always the consequence and the proof of special sin—a doctrine that our Lord put

forth His whole strength to undermine and overthrow. "Whether did this man sin, or his parents, that he was born blind?" To the disciples these were the only two possible causes for his blindness—his own sin, or that of his parents. With the warmth of a real indignation, Jesus answered, "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents"; not indeed that the one or the other was sinless, but to find in bodily suffering only judgment on sin was as uncharitable as it was untrue. "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him."

Suffering in human life has many causes. Suffering is often vicarious. The greatest sufferer of this world was One who never sinned. The judgments of God are a great deep, and the deepest of all is the problem of pain. The special work of God that He would make manifest in this or that suffering may be unknown, unknowable, but it is just there that faith comes to our relief. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith," this faith, namely, that when the mysteries of life are at last opened, the meaning of that mystery will be found in the wisdom and love of God. "Acquaint now thyself with God, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee." In choosing that text we read it only in the

light of the teaching of Christ. The peace that flows from acquaintanceship with God may be painless, but it may not. Tribulation may be our lot, as it was the lot of the Master, and also of His disciples. To know the "fellowship of the sufferings of Christ" was one of the Apostle's cherished ambitions, knowing as he did, that such fellowship was soul treasure.

The good that flows from acquaintance with God may be accompanied with the good things of this life; but it may not. But *the* good of life, the only good worth coveting and striving after, namely, goodness, that will assuredly be ours. Soul peace, soul goodness, these are the results and the rewards of acquaintance with God.

Now that acquaintanceship must be real, living, spiritual, the organic link of fellowship that the branch has with the tree. Acquaintanceship admits of many degrees; we speak of a bowing acquaintance. Many people have a bowing acquaintance with God. They enter His Temple and make their bow once a week, but that is all. For the rest of the week they "cut" God everywhere; they live as if He were not.

The only other passage in which this word is used is Ps. cxxxix: "Thou art acquainted with all my ways." In our human measure, our acquaintance with God in reality, in

thoroughness, must be of the same kind as His acquaintance with us.

In the North of Scotland the word "ackwant" is used in this intimate soul sense. After fifty years of happy wedded life, an old man lost the partner of his soul as well as of his home. Sorrowing inconsolably, he sat by the fire, his head in his hands. His grief was stony; there was not even the relief of tears. His minister called, and sat down beside him. Respecting his grief, he took his hand, but sat silent. After a long silence the old man sighed, tears flowed at last, and he said, "It's verra lonely, you see we were ackwant fifty year."

Where can such acquaintanceship with God be found? There is but one answer: To know Jesus Christ is to be acquainted with God, and that acquaintanceship, in proportion to its reality and fullness, means peace, and it means goodness.

1. First and greatest, it means peace—peace with God. The way to that peace has been opened up. The chasm between God and man has been bridged, and the bridge is the body of His only Begotten Son; and over that bridge—I do not enter into the philosophy of it, the fact is sufficient—we can cross and enter into the family of God and find a Father's welcome. "God is in Christ Jesus, reconciling the world unto himself."

"As ambassadors for Christ, we beseech you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled unto God." Peace with God means peace with ourselves; not indeed that we are perfected, not that we are sinless, not that the tempter is slain, but he is daily overcome. You fight a winning battle. The serpent still writhes, but he is under your heel. Peace with God means peace with Providence, in the discipline of life. Peace with God is self-mastery; it is the mastery of circumstances; it is the mastery of life.

2. Acquaintanceship with God means goodness; it means righteousness. Above some city mission halls you find the words, "Are you right with God?" That question goes to the root of the matter. To be right with God means that you are right in every relation of life, as surely as this earth of ours, being right with the sun, is right also with every other planet of our system.

Can anything greater be said of any man or woman than this, "He is a good man"; "She is a good woman"? The fruits of the Spirit are these, love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, self-control. Nothing in this world is comparable with that.

One summer day some years ago a young minister leaned over a bridge near the Moray Firth. The bridge spanned a stream peace-

fully flowing into the sea. Between him and the sea stood the pillars of a great viaduct, between which one could see the tidal waves break and shimmer in the sun. "If you were to preach here," he said to one of Scotland's very great ministers who stood by his side, "what would your text be?" Without a moment's delay he replied, "Then had thy peace been like a river and thy righteousness like the waves of the sea". There is the symbol, and the sum of it. Peace like a river, flowing always, now in full flood, now in lower ebb, but flowing always, till it meets the ocean.

Righteousness like the waves abundant, "*ab unda*," wave upon wave, ceaseless, constant, unfailing, the never-ceasing tidal waves of the sea. To see that, surely is to covet it; to covet it is to claim it; to claim it is to grasp it and hold it fast, the only true treasure of the soul. "Acquaint now thyself with God, and be at peace: thereby shall good come unto thee."

CHAPTER XX

THE JOY OF JESUS

"And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves."—John xvii. 13.

FEW things are more welcome or more helpful to a minister than that a congregation should send texts or topics on which they would be glad to hear him speak. Of five such topics sent to me recently, all of them Christo-centric, centred about the Person of Jesus Christ (for in this life of ours there is not, and there never will be, any topic of such magnetic and irresistible interest as Jesus Christ)—of five topics sent to me, one was "The Joy of Jesus Christ". The text I have chosen is John xvii. 13, "And now come I to thee",—the impending departure of Jesus Christ, the passing of His Risen Body out of the world of the seen into the world of the unseen,—"and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves".

The Joy of Jesus Christ! What is the content of that? What did He mean by it? To find out that, to probe deep enough to find the joy of any human life, is not that

to unlock the deepest, most real secret of it? Is it not worth while spending some time and thought to discover the content of Jesus' joy?

In the first place, then, the source of that joy lies within, not without. Without entering into the question of the psychology of happiness, it may be said that the happiness of life is of two kinds. One of these we call Pleasure, the other we call Joy; one of these is largely physical, the other is largely spiritual; one of them is fleeting, fading away in the act of enjoyment; the other is deep, abiding, eternal. The source of one of them lies without, the source of the other lies within.

Pleasure may, indeed, be purely physical, sensuous—not sensual, for the moment we do not speak of sinful pleasure—but sensuous, the pleasure of the senses in their innocent and divinely designed exercise.

There is the pleasure of the eye—the beauty of Art, a beautiful picture, a masterpiece of sculpture, a well of pure pleasure to those that are able to drink of it; the beauty of the human form and face, the forms of those whom we know and love. There is the beauty of Nature—the panorama of God's handiwork in Creation—the surpassing glory of a summer sunset on the western seas.

There are the pleasures of the ear—the

music of the human voice, of a great instrument skilfully and soulfully played. There is the music of Nature. Nature is indeed marvellously silent—the cosmic stillness with which the vast spheres came into their places, and with which they revolve through the millenniums of the ages. But when Nature is vocal she is also musical. To the ear attuned to hear, there is music in the drone of the bee, the chirp of the tiniest bird, as well as in the song of the full-throated lark.

There are the pleasures of taste, of the palate, of hunger and thirst satisfied by food and drink. There is the scent of sweet-smelling flowers. There are the pleasures of touch, the memory of the "touch of a vanished hand, the sound of a voice that is still".

The five senses are five gates by which many a pure pleasure enters our frame, and in so far as these pleasures are pure, our Lord shared in them, and enjoyed them to the full.

There are also the pleasures of society—of a happy home. "Domestic Happiness," said Cowper, "the only bliss that survives the Fall." Of that bliss, in the years of His ministry, Jesus knew little or nothing. The foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests, but the Son of Man had not where to lay His head; but in the happy home at

Nazareth He shared that pleasure also, and enjoyed it to the full. Bodily pleasure may, indeed, be perfectly pure. The body of man is God's handiwork as well as the soul. But every such pleasure is transient. The cup is drained, and it stands empty.

> "Pleasures are like poppies spread,
> You seize the flower, its bloom is shed,
> Or like the snowflake on the river,
> One moment white, then gone for ever."

Of one thing we may be certain—that the pleasures of the senses or of society had no place in the thought of Jesus when He spoke of His joy. It was something deeper, diviner than that; it was something that was not dependent on the circumstances of life.

Now that is a great statement to make; is it literally true? Can it be said that the joy of Jesus was not affected by the denial of Peter, by the betrayal of Judas, by Gethsemane and the Cross? To say that would mean that Jesus was in no sense human. To be affected by circumstances is one thing, to be dependent on them is another. In these closing days of His earthly career the burden of life's task fell so heavily, so crushingly on Jesus, that there were moments when the spring of His joy was sealed up, the channel of it was choked. One such moment is recorded when the Greeks came to Philip at the Feast and said, "Sir, we

would see Jesus", and Philip led them to Andrew, and together they brought them to Jesus. When Jesus saw them, He was deeply, strangely moved, and said, "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say?" For in these Greeks He saw the first-fruits of the Harvest of redeemed humanity, but He saw also the Passion through which He must pass before that harvest could be reaped. But that moment passed—passed almost in a breath. "But for this cause came I to this hour. Father, glorify thy name." Another such moment came in the Garden of Gethsemane—more than a moment, for three times Jesus went apart, and fell on His knees and clasped His hands, and cried, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." But that moment passed also. "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done." The spring was unsealed and joy flowed again. A third such moment came, deepest, darkest of all, when He felt that God Himself had forsaken Him. "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani," "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" But that moment passed too, and the next word rang with triumph: "It is finished", the task of redemption is complete. Seven times Jesus spake from the Cross, and the last word was, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit". The joy of that was anticipative,

but it was deep and full. Said we not truly that the joy of Jesus, affected as it was and had to be by the last extremities of His life, was nevertheless independent of them? It was a joy that nothing on earth could destroy. How deep and full must have been the volume of it in the other days of His life!

What, then, was that joy? In what did it consist? It consisted in two things: in the absence of two things, and in the presence of their opposites. It consisted in the absence of Sin and of Fear, in the presence of innocence, of an unshakable certitude, an unbroken fellowship with God.

First of all, most of all, it lay in the absence of Sin. Of all the peace-breakers, joy-destroyers of life, the worst is sin. It is just here, indeed, that the difference between pleasure and joy is most clearly seen. That sin in one or other of its many forms may give pleasure is only too true. This pleasure may be intense, so intense that the temptation to it from the anticipation of it alone may be tremendous. But what folly it all is! Is there any tragedy in life so pitiful as that of a man or woman growing old in sin? Is there any folly greater than this, that a man should stretch out his hand and pluck the poppy of pleasure and rob his own soul of its peace and its joy? Is there any bargain in life more madly foolish than this, that a

man should sell his birthright of honour for a mess of pottage, and find no place of repentance though he seek it diligently and with tears? Can any minister, any parent, any friend, be too faithful in warning a young life that is skirting the precipice of the terrible consequences of sin?

The Garden of Eden is literally the Garden of Delight. It was Eden just as long as it was innocent. In that Garden our Lord lived from Bethlehem to Calvary, and that was the prime source of His joy.

Next only to Sin, and very often the consequence of it, is Fear. "Of all the evils of life," wrote Montaigne, "the greatest is Fear." He was wrong there; but next to sin, it is truly the greatest. Past, present, and future, from every quarter of time roll in upon us the waves of fear—the entail of the past, the exacting demands of the present, the anxious uncertainties of the future. If by some magic wand I could uproot and cast out once for all every fear of your life, should I not be the greatest benefactor of it? Can it be done? Jesus Christ can do that. "Perfect love casteth out fear."

There was one occasion indeed when our Lord inculcated the duty of fear. Fear God, He said. "Fear him that hath power to cast body and soul into hell, yea, I say unto you, fear him." Yes, but there are two kinds

of Fear. There is the fear of apprehension, the kind of torment and terror that used to be instilled into the mind of a child about God, till every star seemed the eye of a great omniscient Detective, and the child was afraid to fall asleep for what God might do to it—a cruel, wicked wrong. But there is the fear of a sensitive conscience, the fear of hurting a tender, holy love. That fear is indeed salutary, saving. Jesus had it Himself. "He was heard in that he feared; and though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things that he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him."

A perfect innocence, an unshakable certitude of God in which He was certain of Himself and the task of His life, an unbroken fellowship with God—these were the sources of His joy.

Now every man and woman covets that joy, craves for it indeed more than they know, for the deepest needs of the heart are often misinterpreted. The ultimate hunger and need of every soul is the joy of Jesus Christ. That joy, moreover, God means us to have. The last prayer of Jesus was that His joy might be filled to the full in His disciples. But we must learn to look for it in the right direction. Above all, we must

remember that the source of it lies not without, but within. How often we are tempted to think otherwise, to imagine that if only we had this or that, or if only we were rid of this or that, our happiness would be complete! How utterly deluded we are! The joy of life lies only in life itself.

Clean hands and a pure heart—is there any happiness in life equal to that?

A pure heart, in which the face of God is reflected like the sun in summer in the depths of a mountain tarn, an unshakable certainty of God and His care and love, an unbroken fellowship with Him, like a sky without a cloud—is there any joy comparable with that?

That was the Joy of Jesus Christ, and that joy may be yours now by a living faith and a daily fellowship with Him, and that joy is life's most precious possession, "for the joy of the Lord is your strength".

PART IV

THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

CHAPTER XXI

UNCONSCIOUS INFLUENCE

(*Preached in Regent Square Presbyterian Church, London, on the occasion of the baptism of the minister's babe.*)

"Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them."—Acts. v. 15.

"If every life cast a shadow, and if that shadow were a picture of the life, I wonder what it would be like?" This poser was put by a young lad in the circle of his own home. Looking round on his brothers and sisters he said, "If your life and mine cast a shadow, what would it be like?" Then, with that freedom and frankness with which one member of a family tells off another—and for that discipline we must thank God—he proceeded to describe and define the shadows each one would make. "There is John," he said; "his shadow would be a clenched hand, he is so quarrelsome. There is Sarah; her shadow would be an X, she is so cross." Then he said a fine thing: "Mother would have no shadow; angels do not make shadows". Then quietly, seriously, somewhat precociously perhaps, he added: "If

my life cast a shadow, what would it be?" The question was no doubt answered by the others; they would get their own back again.

A very personal and pertinent question that! If your life or mine cast a shadow, what would it be like?

Now every life has its shadow. Its shadow is its unconscious influence, and that shadow falls on other lives to help or to hinder, to hurt or to heal. There are two ways in which one life influences another. One way is conscious: it is those words that are spoken, and those deeds that are done consciously and of set purpose to influence other lives. The other way is unconscious, and that influence is our personality, our character, the atmosphere of our life.

In one of his great sermons, the late Dr. Dawson speaks of the entrance of two women into a room full of people. The one chills the atmosphere, the other warms it. The one lowers the atmosphere, makes it more carnal; the other lifts it, cleanses it, and makes men think of their mothers, of angels, of God.

1. Now it must be remembered that the only self which influences other people is our real self. Is there then an unreal self? Most certainly there is. Every life has three selves—two of them unreal, one of them real.

The first unreal self is the self of our own

estimate, what we think ourselves to be. That estimate may be moderately accurate, but it may be far out. It may be too high. Unconsciously we think too much of ourselves. Self-esteem is always unconscious, but nothing is more evident to others, and nothing is more offensive. For our own sakes, for our own good name, we must beware of it. "Let no man think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but let him think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith."

But that estimate may be too low. Many people suffer from a complex of inferiority; they suffer from the depression of self-depreciation; they are so "stupid, so slow-witted," they say, and they mean it. They are people of one talent, or no talent at all. They forget that talents are made and multiplied by their diligent use, and they are tempted to take their one talent and wrap it in a napkin and hide it away.

In the sphere of spiritual work this is very frequent. People imagine that they have no call, no gift for spiritual service. "For one person who overestimates his capacity for spiritual service," said Dr. Jowett, preaching in Carr's Lane and asking for workers in his mission, "there are ten who underestimate their powers." That I feel sure is true. How many precious talents, actual and

potential, rust away when they might be put to splendid use! One of the best Sunday-school teachers I ever knew, was a man whose impediment in speech was so bad that utterance was possible only with great effort.

The second unreal self is the self of the estimate of others. That estimate may be very accurate, but that also may be far out. With a great, generous kindness people think too much of us! With a spirit of cold, loveless criticism their estimate may be too low.

Writing to the Church at Corinth, the Apostle speaks of these two selves. With a fine spirit of independence he wrote: "It is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self . . . he that judgeth me is the Lord".

The last of these is the real self; it is life as God sees it and estimates it, and it is that self alone that makes its influence felt on others. If there be one argument more weighty than another for the reality of goodness, it is just this: every day, every hour the shadow of our real self falls on other lives to help or to hinder, to hurt or to heal. "No man liveth unto himself, and none dieth unto himself."

2. It must be remembered also, that the shadow of life falls on the life that makes it.

It is just here that a material object differs from a spiritual. In every analogy from material objects, there is some point at which the analogy fails. The shadow of one part of a mountain may indeed fall on another part, but the shadow of any part cannot fall on itself. I put up my hand between me and the sun; the shadow of my hand falls on my face, but it cannot fall on the hand itself. But life is spiritual, and the law of it is different, for the shadow of each life falls on itself.

Now the shadow of life is the result of acquired habit and character; it is the resultant of the whole of our past. In every moral crisis, in every present choice of good or evil, nothing weighs more heavily than the habit and character of the past. Like every other congregation, this gathering may be divided into two parts. One part is fighting a winning battle. Day after day the struggle between good and evil goes on, but the battle is being won. It was not always so. There was a time when you slipped often, you stumbled, you fell. But it was not with your consent; you were ashamed of it, you fell on your knees, and you owned it. Your soul recoiled from the stain you had contracted. You fell to rise: you were baffled to fight better: you died that you might live. "The only way of

conquering temptation," as one writer puts it, "is to be shocked at it." And now you are winning, and with every victory your store of reserve strength increases, and by the grace of God you can say, "I keep my body in subjection, I fight a winning battle".

But it is not so with all. One large section of believing people fight a losing battle. They yield, and yield, and yield again. Inwardly, if not outwardly, they fall, and with every concession, every compromise, they are storing up a reservoir of weakness, which in moments of temptation breaks through its sluice, and weighs the balance down on the side of defeat.

But, thank God, the entail of the past, the power of acquired habit and character may be broken. That is the central truth of the Gospel of Christ. Sin may not only be forgiven, but the power of it may be broken. People say that the age of miracle is past. The age of the moral, spiritual miracle will never pass. Such miracles happen every day; they happen within our own knowledge and experience. I think to-day of a life deceased many years ago—the chief magistrate of one of our Scottish towns, a philanthropist, a pioneer in every good work. In his earlier years he was addicted to drink, and through drink he fell deep into the mire of vice. But one

day he met God in Jesus Christ. He met Him in the ordinary service of his church. His heart was opened. The Lord Jesus entered. From that day he was a new creature; the old life fell from him like a discarded garment. He was clothed in righteousness and in power, and from that day till he died he never fell into vice again.

3. Most of all we must remember that the shadow of our life falls on others. Shadow is the right word; for a shadow may be sinister, wholly evil, but it may be altogether beneficent and good. That shadow falls on the youngest. In the Providence of God a babe is born into a believing Christian home. From the moment of its birth the influence of other lives plays upon it, especially the life of the parents, above all that of the mother. There is an old Jewish proverb which says, "Because God could not be everywhere, He made mothers". The theology of that saying will not bear examination, but it contains a great truth—this truth, namely, that in the years of infancy and childhood the mother does stand to the child in the place of God. Happy indeed is that babe that is born into a believing Christian home, whose first lisping words are words of faith and prayer. In this world I question whether there be one sight more touching, more beautiful, than this—

a little child saying its evening prayer, or singing:

> "Jesus loves me! this I know,
> For the Bible tells me so;
> Little ones to Him belong;
> They are weak, but He is strong."

As life grows, shadows multiply and fall upon it with growing weight. There is the shadow of an elder brother or sister. What a power of maleficence or of beneficence lies in the shadow of an elder brother or sister! The late Principal Rainy was brought up in the Christian home of his father, a medical doctor in Glasgow. In that home it was the fine custom at dinner on Sunday to speak of the sermon, never in the words of fault-finding, but by question and answer to explain it to the children. On the Sunday in question the elder sister Anne was away on a visit. She was greatly loved and greatly missed. The father told the children how good a thing it was to have Jesus Christ in the heart, when little George said, "Is it as good to have Jesus in the heart as to have Anne back again home?" Happy indeed are those little children that have an elder sister like that!

There is the shadow of teachers, and later still the shadow of an employer. What potentialities lie in these shadows! In the vestry of this church are the portraits of

some famous men. One of them is the late Leone Levi, at one time Professor of Commercial Law in King's College, London, the author of several standard works, the founder of British Chambers of Commerce. Leone Levi was a Jew, and as a boy he was apprenticed to a fine Christian employer in Liverpool, who, knowing that he was a Jew and respecting his convictions, abstained from any comment on his faith. But young Levi respected his employer and loved him, and saw that he had something that he did not have, and set out to find what it was. He discovered where he attended church, and he worshipped there. He found the secret of his employer's life in Jesus Christ. The shadow of that employer's life led his apprentice to Christ.

This morning and always we are met under a great luminous beneficent shadow, a shadow 1900 years long, the shadow of Jesus Christ, of which long ago a prophet said, "A Man shall be as a hiding place from the wind, a covert from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land". This is His banqueting house, and under His shadow we take delight. To live daily under that shadow means that the shadow of our life will fall on others, never to hinder, but always to help, never to hurt, but always to heal.

BAPTISMAL ADDRESS

WHAT is the content, the spiritual content, of this ordinance—the Baptism of a child ?

That content is fourfold.

1. It is a solemn Declaration of the rights and privileges of a child, as being born into a Christian church and a Christian home.

By the law of the land, one of the first obligations after the birth of a child is its registration, by which its earthly parentage is declared. For this life, that is essential. Its rights as a citizen of Great Britain, and a member of its home, are thereby declared and assured. In the Sacrament of Baptism, its heavenly parentage is declared. It is a child of our Heavenly Father, a member of His home, and a member of Christ's Church on the earth.

2. It is the Presentation of the child to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, in the glad memory and encouragement of His own words : " Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven." Jesus took little children (literally infants) in His arms and blessed them.

3. It is the Reception of this little one, not only by the parents, but also by the Church in the fellowship of their joy and of their responsibility, remembering the gracious promise of our Lord: "Whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me".

4. It is the Reconsecration of parents and members of this congregation to Jesus Christ, with the promise that, God helping us, we shall so live in word and in deed that our life will never put a stumbling-block in the way of a child, but by life and example will prepare and pave its way for union now and always with our Lord.

Confessing your faith now in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, you promise, do you not, by God's grace, to receive this little one as His gift to you, and to bring her up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?

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